



THE PARISH OF WITNEY



St Mary the Virgin, Witney

Social Audit

January 2012

Catriona Robertson

www.catrionarobertson.wordpress.com

Cover photo: Brian Robert Marshall under [Creative Commons Licence](#).

Photos on pages 9 (lower), 11 (top), 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 (top) have kindly been shared by Ian Meyrick.

Other photos are by Catriona Robertson.

Revd Toby Wright, Rector

St Mary the Virgin

Church Green

Witney

Oxfordshire OX28 4AW

01993 779492

wtparish@btinternet.com

www.witneyparish.org.uk

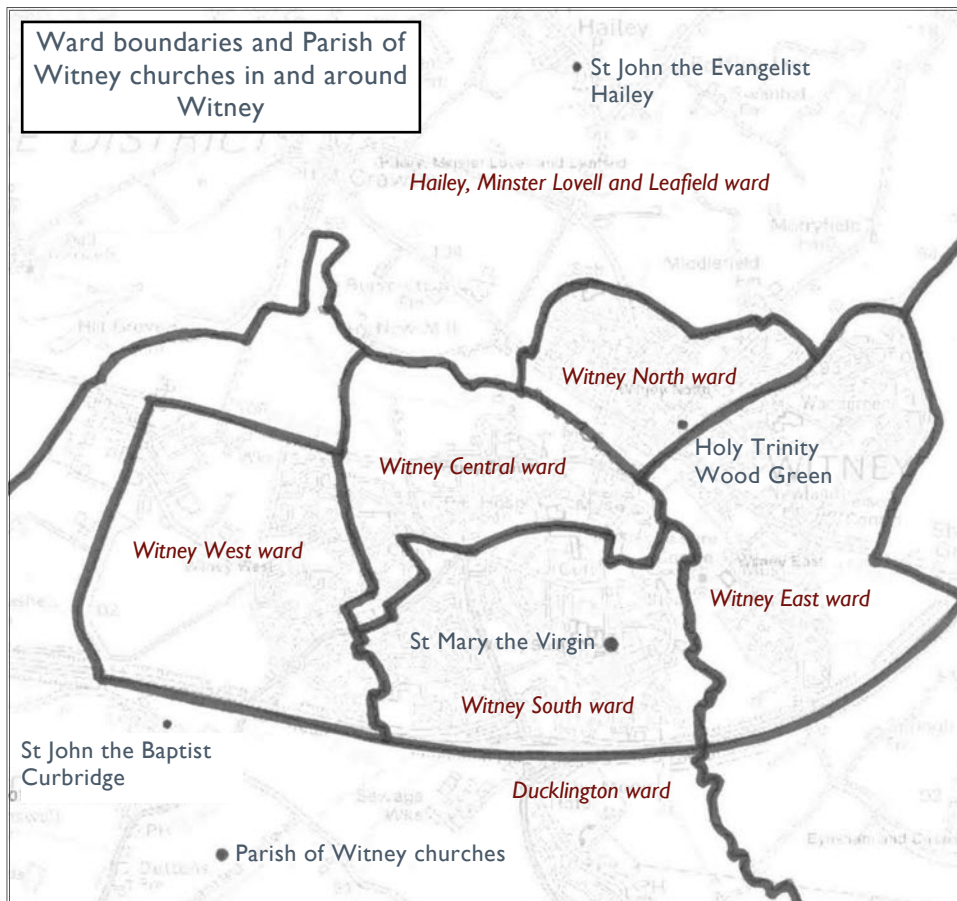
The social audit would not have been possible without the generous participation of the Rector, clergy, the Appeal Committee, key lay people within the parish of Witney and leading members of the wider community.

A Statement of Need has been compiled, alongside a Statement of Significance and an attractive Appeal pack, all of which are available from the parish office.

Contents

Introduction	5
History	7
Setting and context	10
Witney's people	12
Health	14
Witney at work	15
Housing	16
Crime and safety	17
Education	18
Transport	20
Lifestyle and deprivation	21
Conclusions	23
What St Mary's offers	25
Recommendations	27
Further information and links	28

Introduction



A social audit for St Mary's Church, Witney, was commissioned as part of the appeal for the restoration and renewal of the church building within the context of the parish, its four churches, the town of Witney and the surrounding area.

The first stage of the appeal has been very successful, with the roof of the church now in good repair.

The next stage, which will enable the spacious interior of the building to be fully appreciated, equipped and used by both the worshipping congregation and the wider community, is now underway.

The social audit has used statistics from a variety of sources (see appendix for details). Links to many of them can be found in the text and graphics.

Statistics are available for various types of geographical area. Witney is the largest town in West Oxfordshire, which is one of five districts in the county. There are three levels of local government: Oxford County Council, West

Oxfordshire District Council (local authority) and Witney Town Council. Wards are the smallest administrative and electoral areas.

Five wards (see left) cover the bulk of Witney's population and figures for this area are used most frequently in the social audit. Two of the parish's churches are in rural wards.

Some statistical information is not available at local level, in which case figures for West Oxfordshire, Witney Parliamentary Constituency or Oxfordshire have been used.

Census statistics are the most detailed and reliable, but figures for the 2011 Census are not yet available and the 2001 data are now rather out of date.

More recent information (for example the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010, which uses data from 2008) is available for some topics.

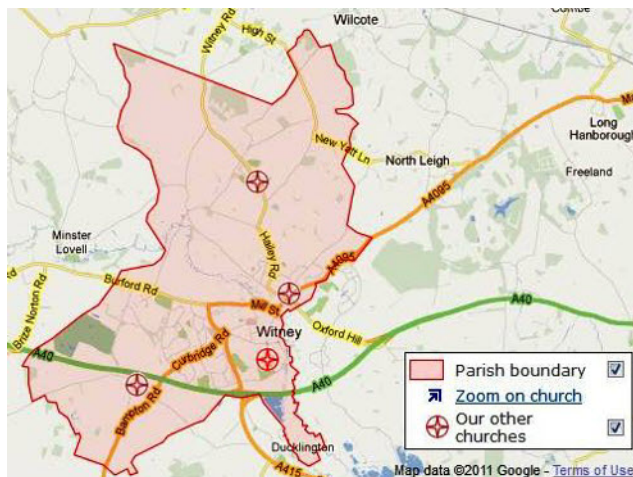
The maps on the right show the Middle Layer and Lower Layer Super Output Areas (SOAs) which cover Witney. These are geographical areas created in order to compare statistical data from small areas.

The Lower Layer SOAs are able to reveal a more detailed picture.

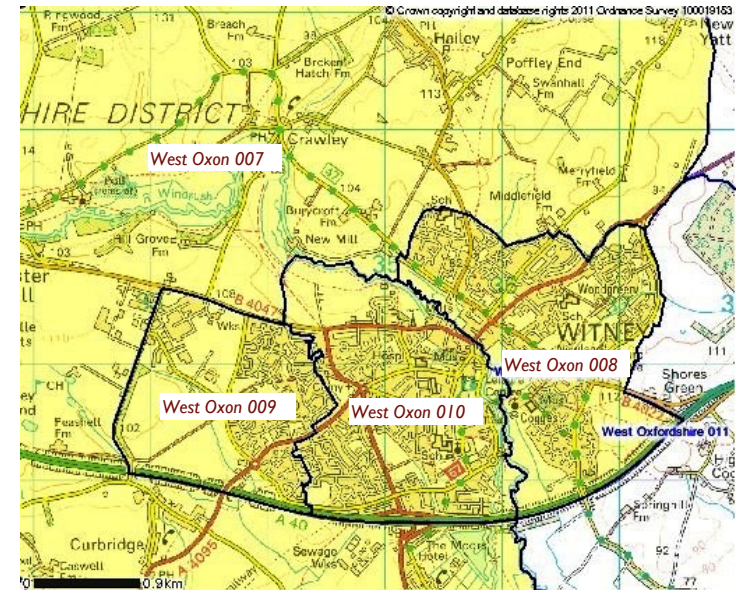
The latest available data has been used throughout the audit. The Oxford County Council's Data Observatory is a good source of national and local information for the area.

The parish boundary (see below) is only coterminous with administrative boundaries where they follow local watercourses.

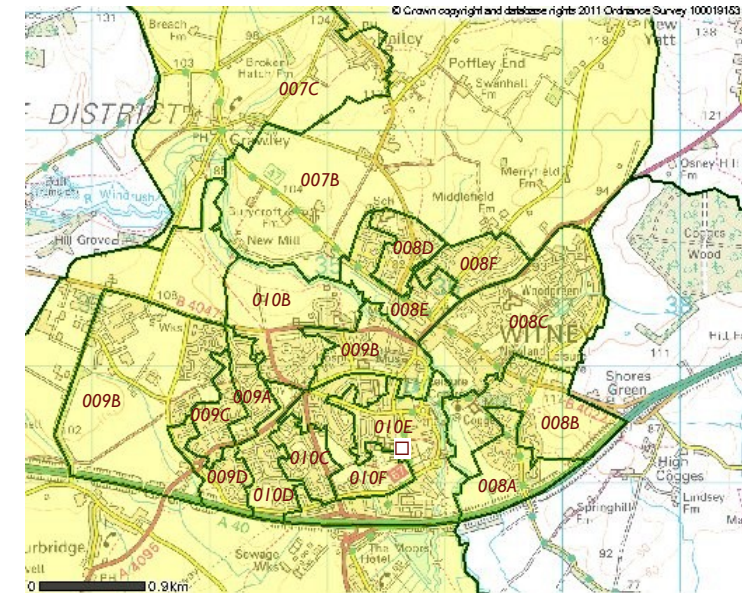
The social audit explores the opportunities for St Mary's to serve the area as a whole.



Map downloaded from [A Church Near You](#)



Middle Layer Super Output Areas in Witney, Hailey & Curbridge.
(Map downloaded from ONS via [Oxford Data Observatory](#))



Lower Layer Super Output Areas
 St Mary's falls within SOA 010E, on the border of 010F.

(Map downloaded from ONS via [Oxford Data Observatory](#))

History



The last mill, Early's, closed in 2002, but Witney blankets still fetch a price.

(www.thebuckettree.bigcartel.com)



Detail showing St Mary's Church at the top of the Green, and what became the Market Square and Corn Street, from Trevor J Cooper's *Conjectural Reconstruction of the Bishop's New Town of Witney c 1300*, from *A Walk Round Witney* by Witney and District Historical and Archaeological Society (permission to reproduce applied for).

St Mary's Church lies at the historic heart of Witney. The building and the interweaving traditions of church and community life are witness to the lives of local people from early medieval times to the present day.

Some of Witney's footballers ([Witney Town Football Club](#)) are known as the Blanketmen - a reminder that the town's main source of wealth from the Middle Ages was wool and, since the seventeenth century, the manufacture of blankets.

Wool was the key to Witney's success as a market town for centuries. The last woollen mill closed in 2002 but well before that the town's economic base had diversified. Instead of facing decline, Witney has seen a steady rise in small, medium and large businesses and a quadrupling of its population over the last sixty years.

In 1044 the Bishop of Winchester was given the manor of Witney by King Edward the Confessor and Queen Emma and it is likely that a church was then built on the site of St Mary's. Witney continued to enjoy very close ties with the royal family throughout the Middle Ages.

Additions, restoration and re-ordering have taken place over the centuries but the church is still one of the largest single covered spaces in West Oxfordshire and protected by Grade I listing by English Heritage as a building of "exceptional national interest".

The earliest record is of a Norman church in 1142, parts of which can be seen incorporated into the present building, which was dedicated in the mid-thirteenth century.

The Bishops of Winchester also played a part in the development of the wool trade in Witney. They grazed sheep on their large estates on the river Windrush and in the thirteenth century Bishop Peter

History

des Roches laid out what is now Church Green and Market Square (see left), encouraging trade which included a weekly market and two annual fairs. Water from the river was used in the manufacture of woollen cloth.

In Tudor times, many in Witney embraced various strands of Protestantism. During the Civil War, Witney supported the Parliamentarians and after the restoration it became a centre for non-conformism. John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement, visited regularly. Quaker, Baptist and Independent congregations grew in prominence - a feature of Witney church life which continues today.

The railway arrived in the nineteenth century, boosting the wool trade by bringing coal to the mills and taking blankets to London. Many of the mill owners were Methodists: attending church increased the likelihood of a job at the mills.

The blanket industry survived the depression of the 1930s but the popularity of duvets and then central heating in the 1970s and 1980s led to a decreasing market in the woollen goods that bore Witney's name.

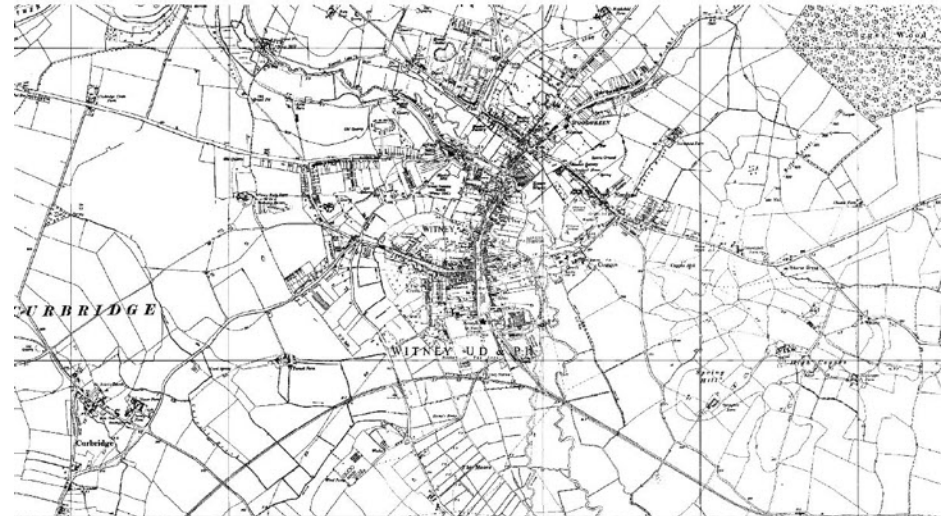
Smiths Industries bought a factory in Witney in 1949 and, in keeping with the post-war climate of social responsibility, built 192 houses for its employees.

Housing schemes have continued to be developed to accommodate the rising population, as more and more light industrial and larger businesses have made Witney their home.

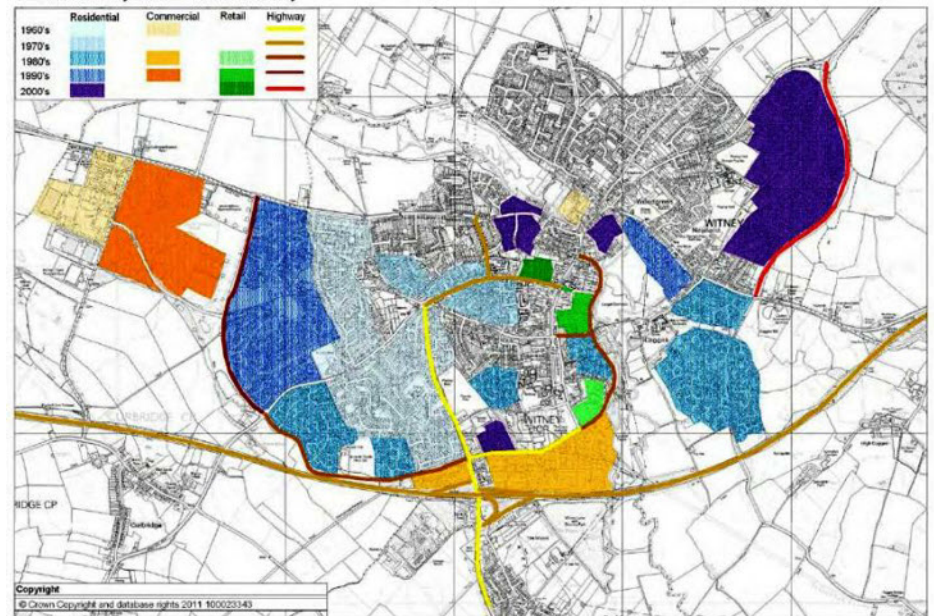
The town grew slowly from the Middle Ages through to the mid twentieth century, with an extension of the High Street from Market Square to Wood Green and ribbon development along the roads out of town.

A map showing Witney in the 1950s (see right) shows Church Green, Market Square and Corn

Witney, circa 1955 – Before modern development



Growth of Witney from 1960 to Present Day



Maps from West Oxfordshire District Council (Cogges Link Road enquiry, 2011, p22 & p28) show the growth of Witney 1950s-2000s: the upper map shows the medieval town centre of St Mary's, Church Green and Market Square extended to Wood Green; the lower map shows the extensive housing and business developments since 1960.



A quiet corner of St Mary's - the church which will become increasingly useful, inspiring and engaged with the wider population of Witney as the restoration and renewal gets underway.



The Witney Feast bring people together from across the town. The Elvis Evening, held in St Mary's, was a popular part of the weekend in 2010.

History

Street all as prominent as in medieval times.

Housing developments since the 1950s, however, have expanded the town considerably. They include (see page 8) Smiths Estate, Burwell, Newland, Cogges, Thorney Leys, Deer Park and Madley Park, along with industrial estates providing good employment at Station Lane, Bromag, Windrush Park and Thorney Leys.

The town has also become popular for those looking for affordable housing within commuting distance of Oxford, Swindon, Abingdon and London.

Witney has retained and developed its historic centre.

Local schools such as The Batt School, St Mary's Infant School and The Henry Box School thrive in their original locations and continue to use their historic buildings in creative ways, actively passing on the heritage of Witney to new generations.

St Mary's Church has been part of Witney life from the beginning.

Its unique position in West Oxfordshire, its spacious beauty, history, and current use continue to inform and support a wide range of community activities.

Setting and context

Location

St Mary's Church holds a striking position at the top of Witney's Church Green (see cover) and the graceful spire is a focal point for miles around.

Visitors and residents alike are drawn to the serenity of the church, lying so close to the heart of the busy market town.

St Mary's is one of four churches in the parish of Witney. Holy Trinity in Wood Green (in the north of the town), St John the Evangelist in the village of Hailey and St John the Baptist in the village of Curbridge all have their own character, congregations, patterns of worship and a wide range of community activities.

Witney lies 13 miles west of the City of Oxford in the south east region of England. It is the largest town in West Oxfordshire and the 27,000 residents constitute a quarter of the district's population. West Oxfordshire is one of five districts within the County of Oxford.

Although nearby Oxford is a city of world renown, Oxfordshire itself is the most rural county in the South East. Over half the population lives in small towns or villages.

Carterton is the second largest town in the district (population of 16,000). It is very close to the RAF's Brize Norton base and is 6 miles from Witney.

Witney thrives as a market town and is the largest service centre in the district, "meeting the employment, shopping, leisure and other needs of most of West Oxfordshire's residents" (*Local Development Framework, Draft Core Strategy, 2011*).

It is very popular as a shopping destination. With free parking, an excellent range of independent retailers and the recent addition of a cinema and well-known high street names at Marriott's Walk, Witney is attracting people who might otherwise travel to Oxford.

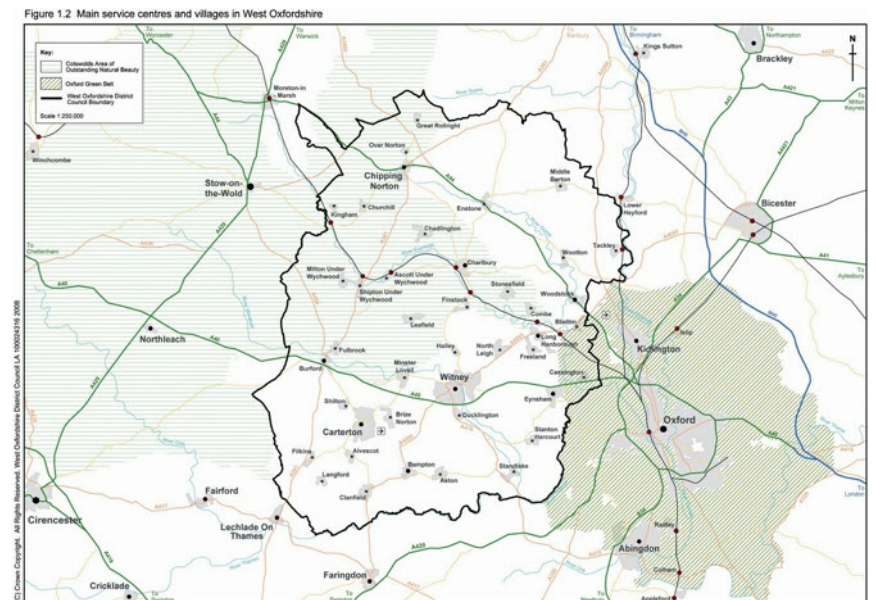
Witney is a good starting point for tourists and visitors to Oxfordshire and as a gateway to the Cotswolds.

The town continues to draw from a wide area as well as serving the people who live and work in Witney.

The position of St Mary's Church, close to the schools and shops in the centre of town but nevertheless a landmark building in a protected conservation area, gives it a wide



Holy Trinity Church at Wood Green, one of the four churches in the parish.



Witney lies to the west of Oxford, within West Oxfordshire District.



Witney Feast, the ever-popular community festival which brings everyone together and dates from the consecration of St Mary's Church in the thirteenth century. During WWII the Feast was held under canvas to comply with the blackout.



Christmas lunch for all the community, organised by St John the Evangelist at Hailey, one of the four parish churches.

Setting and context

range of opportunities to serve local people.

To the south of the church lie playing fields, a recreation ground and the Leys, a large area of open green space which is used for the Witney Feast. A Sainsbury's supermarket is close by, providing parking for shoppers.

Next to the church is The Henry Box School, a secondary school which dates from 1660. St Mary's Infant School is further down Church Green. The popular Fleece inn brings business people, visitors and residents to Church Green and the Green itself is used as a place of relaxation, especially during the summer and in good weather and occasionally for trade fairs and entertainment.

The footpath running alongside the west door of the church is well used by school pupils and their parents, young people, workers and shoppers walking into town from the two nearby car parks, the all-weather pitches, recreation ground and the Station Lane Industrial Estate.

As well as those who enter the church for a service, a social event or

to visit the historic building, there are some who use it as a place for quiet reflection. The prayer board is usually full of requests, which are prayed at mid-week services.

The church building is surrounded by its churchyard, trees and a row of almshouses. Inside, the church is light, beautiful, airy and spacious - and exceptionally wide for a church built to a cruciform plan.

Several interviewees during the social audit described the 'awe factor' when people, including children and young adults, step inside.

The capacity of this ancient place of worship is huge: more than 600 people are able to gather at one time.

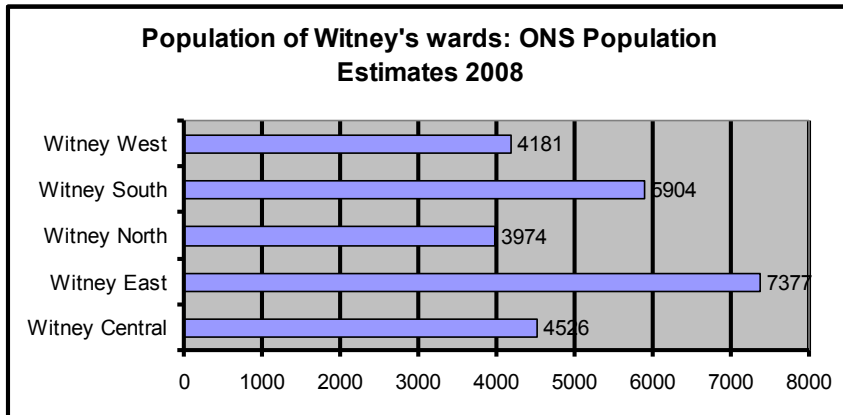
An AA guide introduces Witney as "attractive without being twee, smart without being 'touristy', In short, it is classic Middle England.

"One of Witney's best views is looking across Church Green to the parish church at the southern end. This quiet corner of town has the feel of a small English cathedral city and if Witney were ever descended upon by tourism marketing men, the focus of their attention would surely be here."

Witney's people

Population

Witney's population has more than quadrupled from 6,554 in 1951 to 27,569 (projected figure for 2012). Further employment opportunities and housing developments are planned.



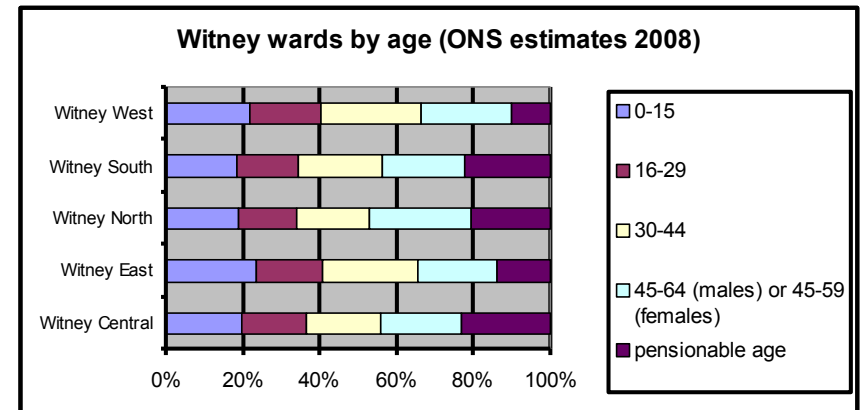
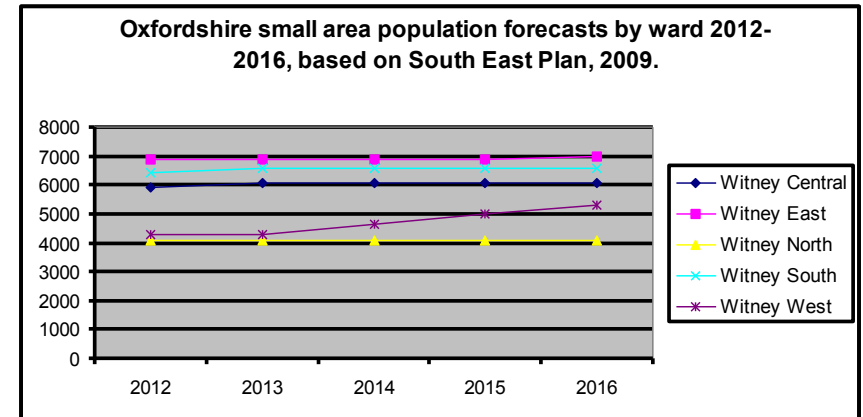
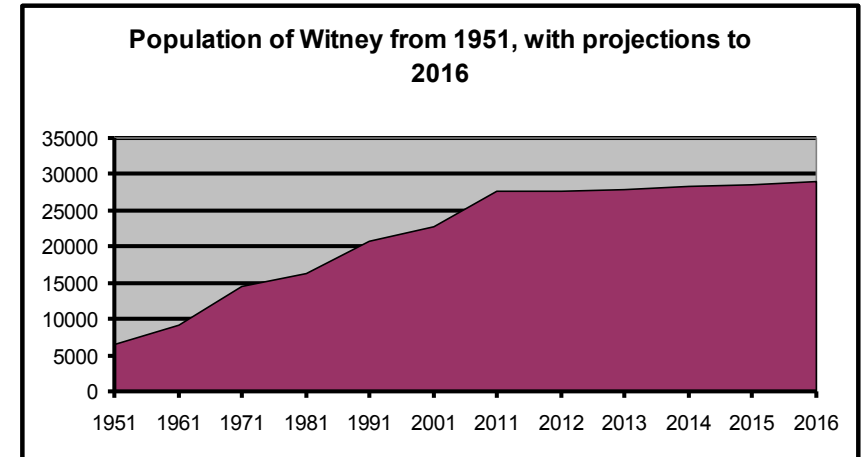
According to Oxfordshire's Small Area Population Forecasts, based on the regional plan for housing, Witney West (see centre right) is expected to see most of the increase in residents over the next four years.

The Oxfordshire Population and household forecasts 2010, which use expected housing developments to estimate figures, show Witney Central, Witney West and Witney East predicted to grow by 44%, 23% and 16% respectively between 2006 and 2016.

Witney East (see above) has the highest population and Witney West and East have the youngest residents (see below right). Witney Central and Witney South have the highest proportions of residents of pensionable age.

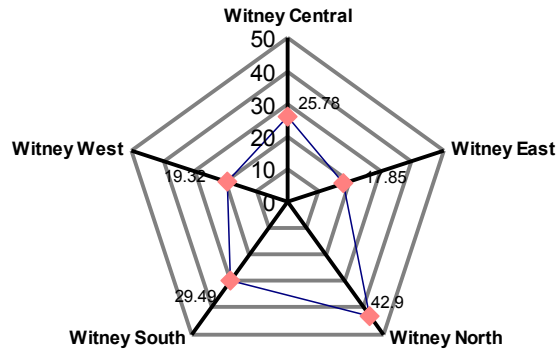
West Oxfordshire is expecting the proportion of people over 54 years of age to rise significantly by 2016.

Witney North is considerably more densely populated than the other wards (see page 13) and is also the area of Witney expected to see the least increase in population by 2016.



Witney's people

Population Density (Census 2001)

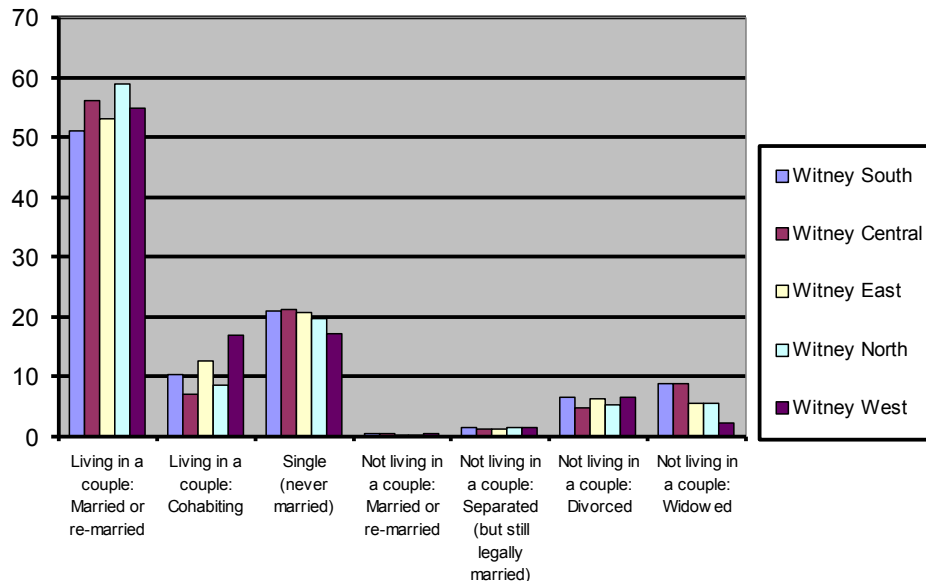


The ethnicity of the population mirrors that of West Oxfordshire. The last Census recorded over 95% of Witney residents as White British, with the largest ethnic minorities being Other White and White Irish.

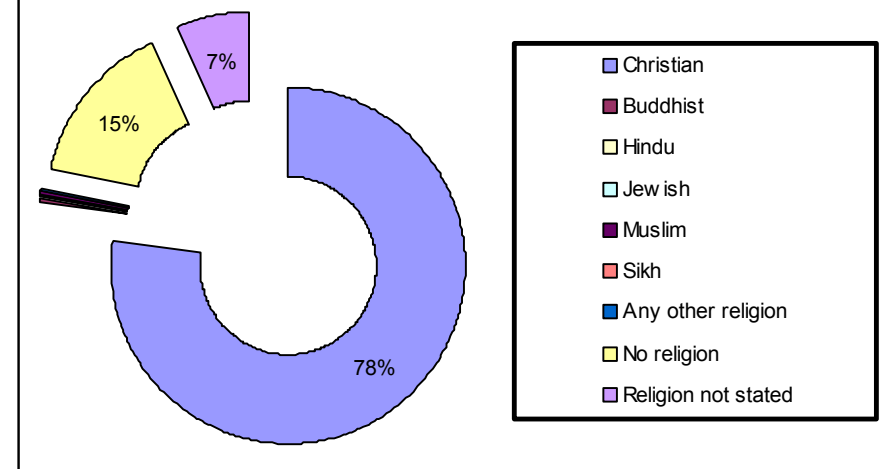
The majority of adults are married or live in couples, around a fifth are single people and a small proportion are divorced or separated (see left).

Nearly a tenth of the adults in Witney Central and South are widowed.

Living arrangements (Census 2001)



Stated Religion (Census 2001), Witney



The majority (78% - a significantly higher proportion than the figure for England as a whole, which is 71%) of Witney residents stated their religion as Christian in the last Census, with 15% stating they had no religion and 7% preferring not to answer the question, which was optional. Those stating other religious traditions were very few - under 1%.

There were 562 lone parent households counted in 2001, with clusters in Lower Layer Super Output Areas 8B (Cogges), 10F (from the Leys, through the Crofts to Marriott's Walk), 9C (Deer Park) and 9A (Smiths) (see lower map on p 6).

Health

Witney residents, along with West Oxfordshire's citizens, enjoy comparatively good health and life expectancy compared to the country as a whole.

There are pockets of Witney where there is less good health, most notably the area which sweeps from the Leys at the back of St Mary's north-west through Queen Emma's Dyke and round to Abingdon and Witney College (see right).

There are four GP surgeries in Witney:

- [The Nuffield Practice](#)
- [The Windrush Health Centre](#) (the newly constructed centre is due to open early in 2012)
- [Cogges Surgery](#)
- [Deer Park Family Medical Practice](#)

There is a [Community Hospital](#) at Welch Way and well-used sports and leisure facilities.

The latest Health Review for West Oxfordshire was published in 2011. There are concerns across the district as a whole that children are not as physically active as they should be.

The other two indicators which are significantly worse than the England

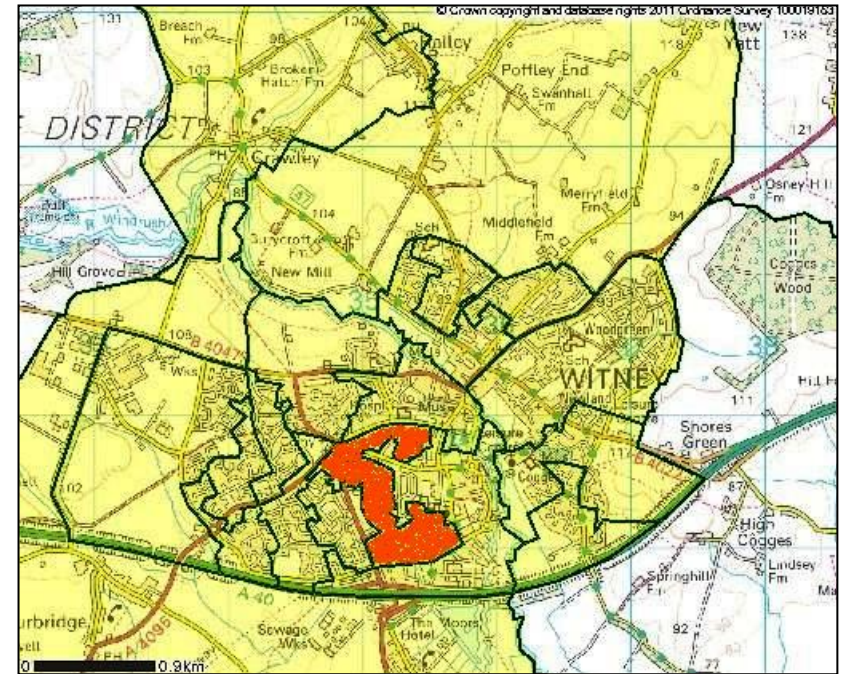
average are the incidence of malignant melanoma and road injuries and deaths ([West Oxfordshire Health Profile 2011](#)).

The Profile reports that life expectancy for men (80.2 years) and women (84.1 years) is higher than average in England (78.3 and 82.3 respectively) and that early death rates from cancer, heart disease and stroke have fallen in recent years.

Around 14% of Year 6 school children and 24% of adults are obese in West Oxfordshire and a lower than average percentage of children spend at least three hours each week on school sport.

Priorities for the NHS in the district include

- tackling obesity
- increasing physical activity
- reducing high risk alcohol behaviour
- improving older people's activity programmes to reduce hip fractures



The shaded area (SOA 10F) has the least good health in Witney (within the 40% of areas in England which are most deprived within the Health and Disability domain. [Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010](#)).



NHS priorities in West Oxfordshire include increasing physical activity for children and the elderly

**Jobseeker's Allowance Claimants
(no and % of working age residents, by ward), November 2011**

	Numbers	%
Witney Central	78	2.9
Witney East	72	1.5
Witney North	43	1.7
Witney South	79	2.2
Witney West	45	1.5
Hailey, Minster Lovell and Leafield	27	1.1
Ducklington	20	1.5
West Oxfordshire	913	1.4
Great Britain	-	3.8



Large companies as well as smaller niche enterprises offer employment at Witney's business parks.

Employee Jobs, ONS annual business inquiry employee analysis (2008)

	West Oxon (employee jobs)	West Oxon (%)	South East (%)	GB (%)
Total employee jobs	38,900	-	-	-
Full-time	26,800	68.8	69.0	68.8
Part-time	12,200	31.2	31.0	31.2
Employee jobs by industry				
Manufacturing	5,300	13.6	8.1	10.2
Construction	2,100	5.5	4.5	4.8
Services	30,600	78.5	85.7	83.5
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	9,500	24.5	24.6	23.4
Transport & communications	1,600	4.2	5.9	5.8
Finance, IT, other business activities	8,100	20.8	24.0	22.0
Public admin, education & health	7,700	19.8	25.6	27.0
Other services	3,600	9.2	5.6	5.3
Tourism-related†	4,800	12.4	8.2	8.2

Witney at work

As blanket manufacture declined, Witney planned carefully to ensure the working age population found suitable employment.

A large number of small and medium sized businesses have been attracted to Witney, as well as some larger firms, including Abbott Diabetes Care, the multi-national packaging company Smurfit Kappa and furniture manufacturers CorndeLL Furniture.

Retailing and the care and hospitality sectors are major employers.

There are three major business estates in Witney (Bromag, Windrush Park and Station Lane) and six smaller areas. Together they host a variety of enterprises. There is a strong manufacturing and engineering strand as well as an increasing number of high technology and niche firms.

Some residents commute to jobs in Abingdon, Oxford, Swindon and London. Witney also attracts workers from elsewhere; the nine and twelve hour free car parking is well used by those driving to work.

The table on the left shows the latest available figures on the type of employment found in West Oxfordshire. Distribution, hotels and restaurants form the largest group (24%), with finance, IT and other business activities coming second (21%), followed by public administration, education and health (20%).

The median gross earnings (2011) for employees working in West Oxfordshire (not necessarily residents) was £484 per week and £11.89 per hour for full-time workers, which was less than the Great Britain figures (£503 and £12.95). The median (gross) annual income (ONS 2010) of Witney residents was £23,755 which is above the UK figure of £21,212.

West Oxfordshire (November 2011) had 1.2 Job Seeker's Allowance claimants for each unfilled job vacancy. This compares favourably with the figure for the South East (3.2) and Great Britain as a whole, which had 4.7 claimants for every unfilled job vacancy.

Witney Central has the highest levels in the district (2.9%) of people claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, but this figure is lower than the national average of 3.8% (see left).

Housing

The residential population of an area is mostly determined by the housing available and Witney has attracted several developments of terraced, detached and semi-detached properties over the last fifty years (see [map on page 8](#)). These have increased the population and include

- Smiths Estate
- Burwell
- Newland
- Thorney Leys
- Deer Park
- Madley Park
- Jacobs Mill

Property prices are lower in Witney than in nearby Oxford and some of the West Oxfordshire villages.

Census 2001 found 74% of housing in the OX28 postcode was owner-occupied and according to [UpMyStreet.com](#), average prices over the last three years to December 2011 were £151,000 for a flat, £208,000 for a terraced house, £244,000 for a semi-detached house and £326 for a detached house.

The District Council no longer builds or owns residential property having transferred it to [Cottsway Housing Association](#) in March 2001.

Affordable and social housing in Witney (17% of housing in OX 28 was socially rented in 2001) is in different locations across the town, including Smiths Estate, Cogges, Corn Street, Newland, Hailey Road and near Witney Community Primary School.

Witney has been identified as a strategic development area by the District Council and the Local Development Framework describes the town as 'vibrant and historic' and that it 'continues to be the most sustainable location for further development.'

New housing is planned for the area west of Deer Park and south of Range Road. One thousand homes will be built, along with primary schools, shopping areas and other services. Woodland and allotments will be part of the development and a new road in to the area from the A40 is being considered.

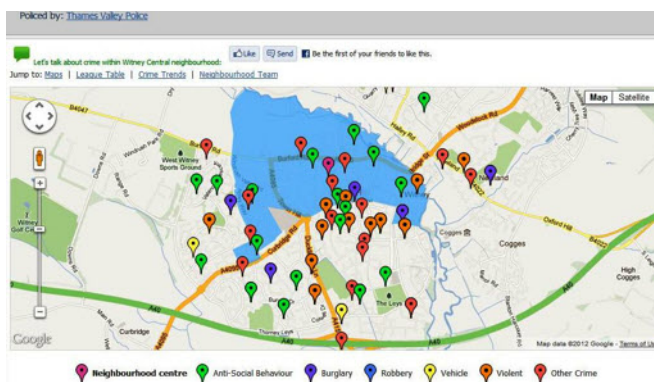
Five hundred new homes are planned for other parts of Witney. An average of 2.5 people occupy one residence. When the new homes are occupied, Witney will have a further 3,750 residents. Plans for nearby Carterton include 1,600 new homes (4,000 people) by 2026.



Housing in Witney:
Burwell (above)
Deer Park (centre)
Thorney Leys (right)

Crime in West Oxfordshire

Year	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Crimes per 1,000 population	50.64	46.95	40.62



UK Crime Stats

Crime maps of Witney can be found at the UK [Crime Stats website](#). The area around St Mary's is relatively free from anti-social behaviour and crime.

Crime rates in West Oxfordshire 1st April - 30th November 2011

	Crimes recorded	Rate per 1000 people
Violence against the person with injury	221	2.13%
Violence against the person without injury	361	3.48%
Serious sexual offences	25	0.24%
Serious acquisitive crime	289	2.78%
Other crimes (eg shoplifting, criminal damage)	1,909	18.39%

Crime and safety

West Oxfordshire continues to be one of the safest areas of the country to live in and crime levels have continued to fall in recent years.

In the eight months to November 2011, the total number of crimes in West Oxfordshire dropped by 13% from 3,221 to 2,805, which places the district within the best performing quartile nationally.

Witney is protected by Thames Valley Police and community safety behaviour, underage drinking and disorderly conduct on the Leys and on Burwell Estate, speeding in residential areas including Corn Street and the High Street and littering, particularly town centre rubbish from the night time economy, including Market Place and Church Green.

Witney's Neighbourhood Action Group consulted 330 local residents in November 2011 and their top priorities were:

- Youths hanging around, intimidating behaviour and perception
- Speeding
- Litter / fly-tipping
- Vandalism / graffiti
- Parking
- Lack of youth activities

An ecumenical initiative, the Late Night Café, run by the Street Pastors, offers refreshments and an informal chat to young people on the streets in the town centre at night, even if they are the worse for wear from drinking. This is appreciated by the young people themselves, who may not otherwise find a listening ear.

The Witney Neighbourhood Action Group has identified anti-social

Crime maps and details of local police officers can also be found at the [Police.uk website](#).

Education

Witney's schools are popular and the pupils achieve good results.

The Henry Box School is situated next to St Mary's at the top of Church Green. There are 1324 pupils aged 11-18 from the south and east of Witney and the school has specialist status in languages, science and mathematics. The latest Ofsted inspection in July 2010 confirmed that the school is good and the performance tables show that GCSE results are improving and above the Oxfordshire and national averages.

Wood Green School is between Wood Green and Madley Park. There are 1105 pupils aged 11-18 from the north and west of Witney and the school has specialist status in visual and performing arts. The school received an outstanding Ofsted inspection report in September 2010. GCSE results are above the county and national averages.

There are two independent secondary schools in the area. Pupils at Cokethorpe School (659 pupils) and The Kings School (143

pupils) achieve excellent GCSE results.

There are two Church of England schools for younger children in Witney: St Mary's Infants School and The Batt Primary School. The Batt School received an outstanding Ofsted report in November 2011. There are eight more primary schools in Witney.

The local further education college is Abingdon and Witney College which is undergoing a major redevelopment.

Educational achievement varies across Witney. Part of Smiths Estate is the most deprived area in West Oxfordshire within the Education, Skills and Training domain of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (which measures educational achievement at school and adult skills) and this area also falls within the 20% most deprived in England (Education domain). Seven more SOAs (mostly in central Witney, Cogges and the area around Hailey Road) fall within the 20% most deprived areas in West Oxfordshire. In contrast, Madley



GCSE attainment (% of 5+ A*-C grades including English & Maths)

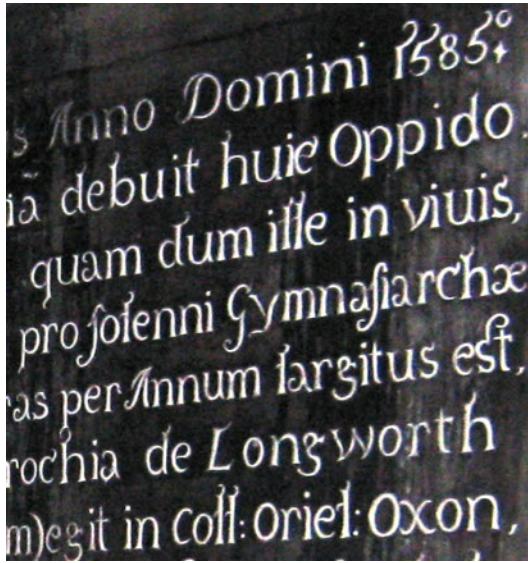
	2008	2009	2010	2011
England & Wales average	48%	50%	54%	Jan 12
Oxfordshire average	50%	53%	57%	Jan 12
The Henry Box School	57%	62%	62%	59%
Wood Green School	62%	56%	62%	Jan 12
Cokethorpe School	73%	79%	91%	Jan 12
The Kings School	90%	100%	94%	Jan 12

(Performance tables for 2011 are published by the Department for Education at the end of January 2012)



The Batt C of E Primary School





Resources for learning are plentiful in and around St Mary's: the memorial to Henry Box (d 1660) whose generosity founded the nearby school.



The prayer board at St Mary's is used by school pupils and many others.

Education

Park and Deer Park fall within the least deprived quintile in England.

The Henry Box School, The Batt School and St Mary's Infant School use their original historic buildings. The history of the schools, and of Witney, is part and parcel of the education the pupils receive.

St Mary's Church is used by some local schools for special occasions - Year 7 introductory services, harvest and carol services, nativity plays and concerts.

The capacity of St Mary's to accommodate parents as well as the school makes it an attractive option - school halls are often only able to seat the pupils and staff. The fine acoustic and soaring architecture of St Mary's gives a sense of occasion to special events which sports and drama halls struggle to provide.

With so many children and young people coming to school and college near St Mary's and sometimes passing by the church itself, it makes sense for the church to ensure they feel welcome and are able to find something of value when they visit, whether or not

they are church-goers. Vox pops surveys amongst secondary school pupils in Witney produced a mixed response. Some said they had visited the church for a bit of head space. This was confirmed later in interviews which mentioned the use of the church made by pupils at The Henry Box School when a recent school leaver died.

Others said that they did not pop in on a regular basis but St Mary's would be the place they would go if they needed somewhere quiet to reflect. Others said they would rather think things through at home.

Some of the schools make good use of the church as a teaching aid. With easy to use teacher and visitor packs for the different Key Stages, St Mary's (both the building and the churchyard) could offer a wider range of hands-on and experiential learning opportunities across the curriculum - including language, drama, science, business studies, history, maths, music and RE.

Transport

Witney is well known for its excellent shopping and there is ample free parking available. Easy parking and a wide range of major and independent retailers attracts many who would otherwise shop in Oxford.

Witney is very car-friendly town, although the traffic bottle neck at the town's only bridge over the river Windrush is notorious. Traffic delays can also increase the journey time to and from Oxford along the A40. An inquiry into a new road, the Cogges Link, is underway and due to report in 2012. If built, the new road would bring traffic around the edge of Cogges, between Oxford Hill and the Witan Way roundabout, which is close to St Mary's Church.

The railway came to Witney in 1861 but was closed to passengers in 1962.

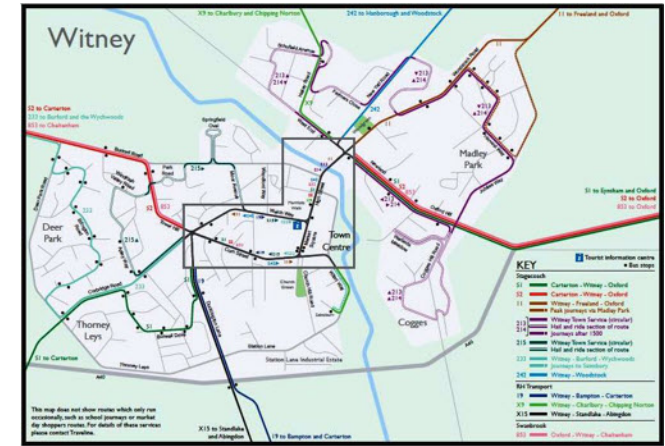
The nearest stations are Oxford, Long Hanborough and Charlbury. Oxford has a frequent rail service to London.

Coach and bus services to Oxford run frequently, including at weekends.

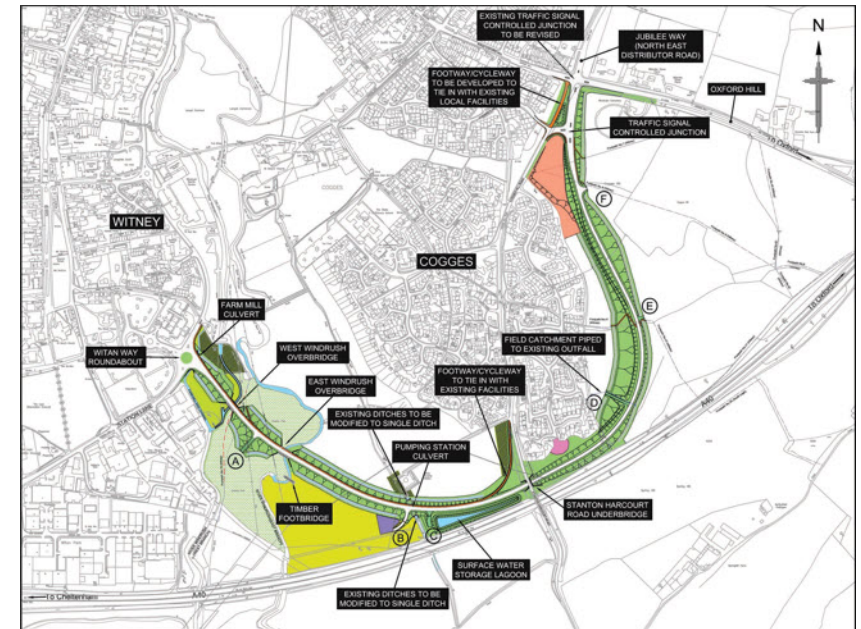
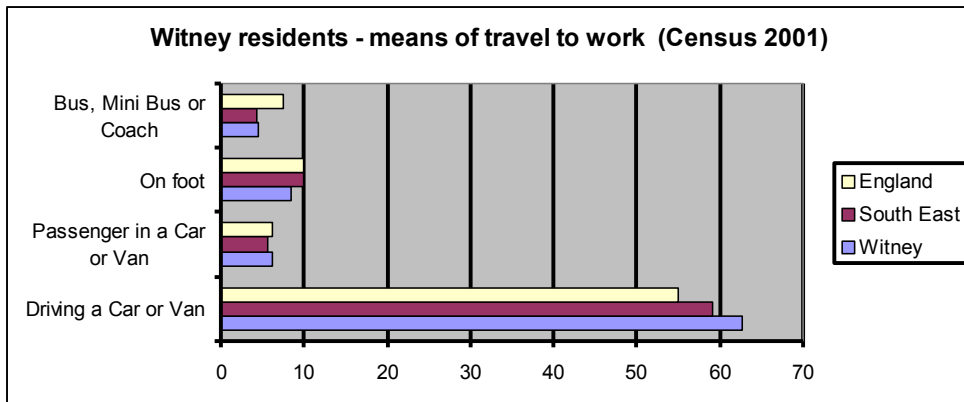
The Windrush Valley Cycle Route (No 47) runs through Witney and on to Northleach.

West Oxfordshire suffers proportionately more deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents than many other parts of the country and air pollution from exhaust fumes is a concern along Bridge Street.

The last Census found that 63% of the working population of Witney drove to work, compared to the England average of 55%. Eight per cent walked and 4% took the bus.

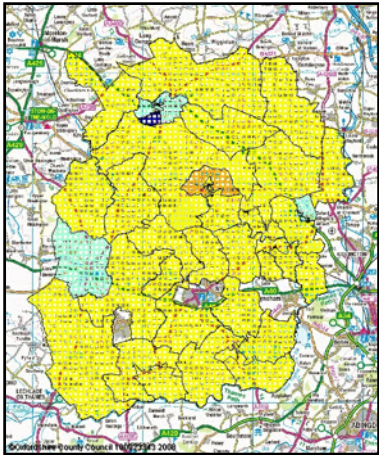


Witney bus services to nearby towns are frequent. This Oxfordshire County Council guide can be [downloaded](#).

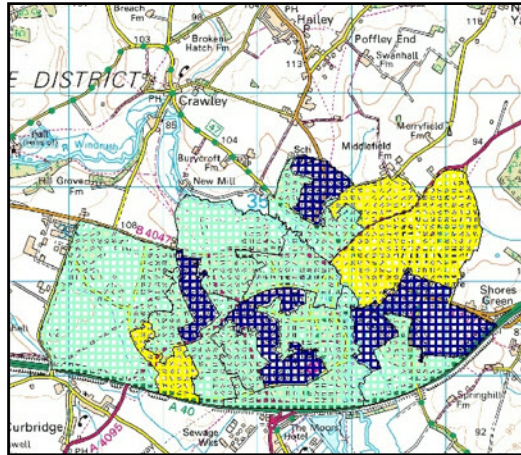


The route of the proposed Cogges Link road, which would end close to St Mary's Church.

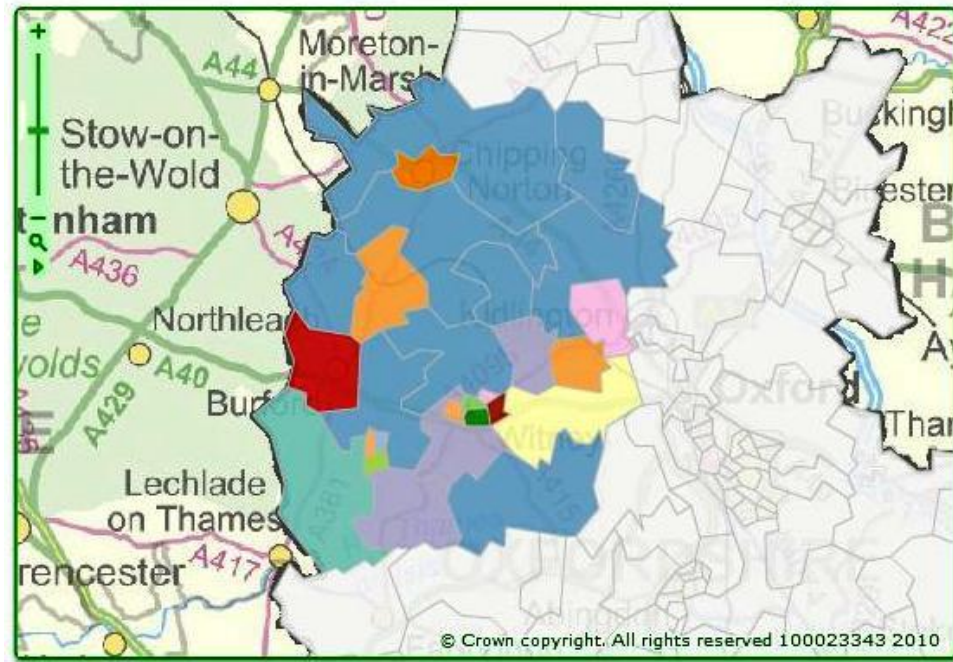
Lifestyle and deprivation



West Oxfordshire's predominant Acorn classification is Wealthy Achievers (in yellow above), whilst Witney classification also includes Comfortably Off (turquoise) and Hard-pressed (dark blue).



Lifestyle Type >> Predominant Mosaic Type >> 2009 >> Filter:



Mosaic classifies most of West Oxfordshire's population as 'Higher income older champions of village communities' (in blue above).

As West Oxfordshire's major market town, Witney reflects most of the district's range of lifestyles and levels of deprivation.

Mosaic (2009) and Acorn (2008) offer different analyses and some of their mapping 'rang true' with interviewees. The Mosaic mapping for the town describes larger areas and therefore produces a broad-brush picture. Both sets of data are available through the [Oxfordshire Data Observatory](#).

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (IMD) show levels of deprivation in a variety of domains.

According to Mosaic, the most common Oxfordshire (and West Oxfordshire) classification is 'Higher income older champions of village communities' (see left) and Acorn also shows the town of Witney surrounded by 'wealthy achievers'.

The picture for Witney is more varied, including the comfortably off and the hard-pressed (Acorn) and five different classifications from Mosaic including busy executives, indebted families and self-employed traders (see page 22).

Much of the housing in Witney is relatively new and the careful planning has ensured a mix of housing tenure and size. There are no obvious areas of deprivation.

Compared to other areas in England, Witney only twice falls into the 20% most deprived category. The SOA 9A (part of Smiths Estate) is within this quintile in the education, skills and training domain and SOA 10A (the north end of the High Street) in the crime and disorder domain.

The West Oxfordshire [Citizens Advice Bureau](#), which has an office in Witney, reports that they advised most people during 2010-11 on debt (34%), benefits (24%) and employment (10%) matters.

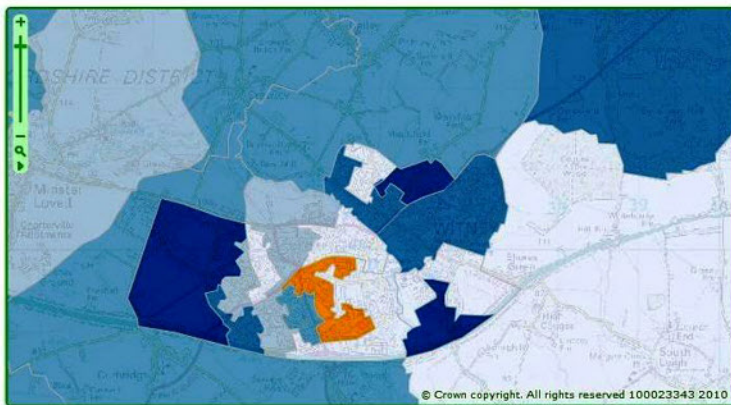
The town includes a mix of ranking within most of the domains and includes areas within the least deprived quintile in all the IMD domains: income, employment, health and disability, education,

Lifestyle and deprivation

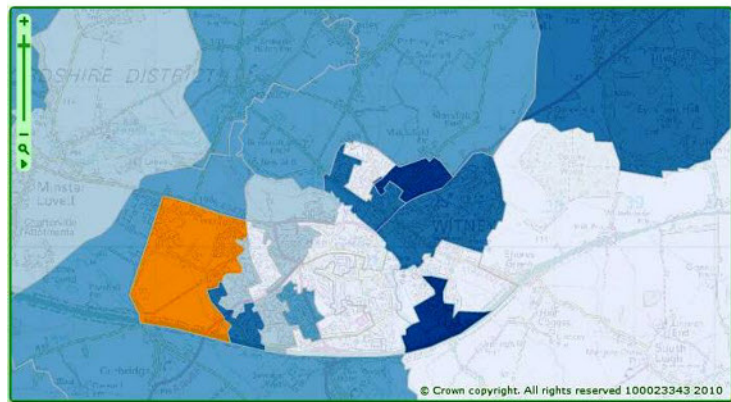
skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and living environment.

Interviewees saw Witney as a hard-working, even feisty, town where people get on well and where you can find work if you want it.

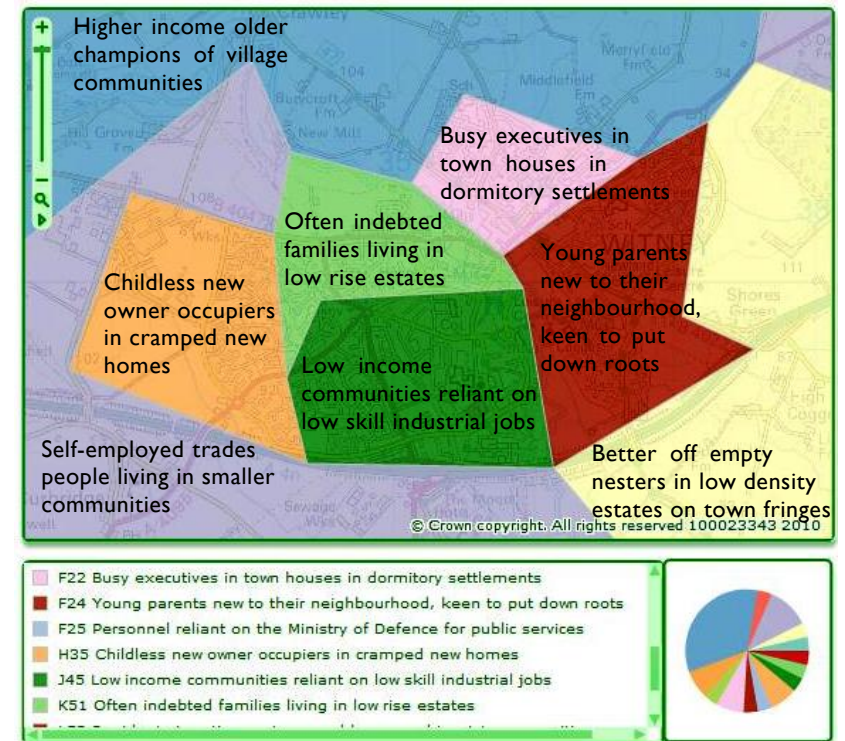
Indices of Deprivation >> IMD Rank >> 2010



Indices of Deprivation >> IMD Rank >> 2010



Maps showing in orange the most (above) and least (below) deprived areas (across all domains) in West Oxfordshire, both of which are found in Witney, according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010.



Classification by Mosaic of neighbourhoods in and around Witney - a broad brush approach which illustrates some characteristics of a neighbourhood.

All maps have been downloaded from [Oxfordshire Data Observatory](#).



The church draws people all year round. Views to St Mary's are protected by law.



The church's acoustic attracts musicians from many different traditions - solo folk singers, brass bands, chamber music and full orchestras and choirs.

Conclusions

Witney is a very successful market town which is growing rapidly. It has a strong sense of its medieval heritage, its part in the wool trade and its continuing role in manufacturing and trading.

St Mary's has been part of this history from the beginning and has renewed opportunities to be of service to the current population, its civic structures, schools, businesses and visitors.

As the building with the largest capacity for miles around, St Mary's is the venue of choice for large gatherings.

School head teachers, music groups and cultural organisations all acknowledge the sense of occasion that St Mary's as a venue lends to an event.

However, all interviewees pointed to a need for improved and more flexible seating, lighting and heating.

This work will also increase St Mary's capacity to serve the other churches in the parish and, with them, to be able to offer a wide range of spaces with differing qualities and facilities. It will also enable St Mary's to host larger ecumenical and civic events than is possible at present.

When the restoration and renewal is complete, the improvements will enrich the worshipping life of the church, allowing for a range of liturgical expression to meet the needs of a growing and active town.

The main service centre for the rural district of West Oxfordshire, Witney is a popular place to live.

With the regular additions of new housing and business developments over the last sixty years, Witney's adult population has mostly arrived from other parts of the country.

The population has a mix of young couples, families and older people and is set to rise again significantly over the next few years.

A high proportion describe themselves as Christian. The town has seventeen active churches,

Conclusions

including a strong and busy Methodist centre on the High Street which has a suite of rooms, a café and several projects which are very well used and appreciated.

Health is generally good although the population is encouraged to be more physically active.

Unemployment and crime is low and new businesses continue to find a home in Witney.

Cars are welcome, although traffic congestion is a problem at peak hours. Bus services are good.

There are well over two thousand secondary school students and as many at primary school. The schools are using St Mary's regularly and would do so more frequently if the seating, heating and lighting were improved and if the seating was more flexible.

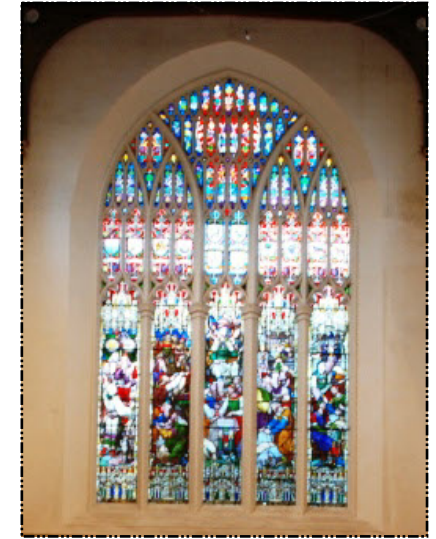
Local organisations, drama and music groups use school premises for some of their activities, rehearsals and performances, but for large audiences the choice is very limited. For events which benefit from a good acoustic quality,

high ceilings and fully accessible facilities, there is very little to choose from.

The closure of the Corn Exchange and the limited capacity and facilities at the Langdale Hall (refurbished and now re-opened) have only increased the need for a large, well-equipped space which complies with modern requirements such as wheelchair access.

The location and setting of St Mary's is unique and sought after for weddings and major events. Improved kitchen facilities would immediately open up opportunities for St Mary's to offer a range of packages combining catering, flowers, table dressing, invitations or promotion. Interviewees confirmed that a range of options for weddings would be particularly popular.

With an entrepreneurial approach, fully integrated into the mission of the church, St Mary's could enhance its ability to be the first port of call as a major venue for cultural events and a good source of information and signposting.



The west window at St Mary's (top) and the church filled with visitors to the model exhibition (above)



St Mary's has been a focal point for Witney and the surrounding countryside for centuries.



The spacious interior makes a striking setting for a wide range of activities.

What St Mary's offers

St Mary's has an exceptionally able clergy and lay leadership team, keen to see the church bringing benefits to all - not only the worshipping community.

They know that the church building in the heart of Witney has immense potential to serve the townspeople, the other three churches in the parish, the rural areas and those from further afield. As Witney continues to grow, a place for large numbers to gather together becomes ever more pressing.

Encouraging the maximum use of this ancient and beautiful church by restoring it to its full glory will benefit local people, have a transformative impact on cultural and community life and secure the future of its centuries-old building.

St Mary's has a number of different spaces which can be used separately. The light in the north transept is good for exhibitions and would also provide a good setting for formal dinners. The nave is wide and majestic and has a beautiful stained glass window at the west end.

The sanctuary offers a quiet place of reflection and could be developed further. The Winchester Room is well used - an upgraded kitchen would allow professional catering to be provided on site for weddings,

funerals, special church services and cultural events.

A range of catered options for weddings and other occasions would make St Mary's significantly more attractive for potential users.

A strong marketing campaign and entries in publications such as Oxfordshire Guides for Brides would be needed.

The whole church can be used at one time, with a focus at the crossing. There are plans to bring the central focus for worship and performances a little further west,

What St Mary's offers

to accommodate the sight-lines of those seated to the north and south.

St Mary's is already used by film festivals, exhibitions and for a wide range of fund-raising and musical events, from Elvis Nights and acoustic evenings to Haydn's Creation with a full orchestra and choir.

As the largest medieval building in West Oxfordshire, performances and cultural events in St Mary's have an added dimension. Flexible and creative lighting will create a range of 'looks' and digital projection onto the white walls will give further opportunities for creativity.

St Mary's has signed up to the sMeasure energy management programme, which will help identify areas where the church can take action to reduce both the building's carbon footprint and its energy bills. This places St Mary's at the forefront of those using the latest technological advances to protect the heritage of medieval buildings in a sustainable and responsible way. It forms part of an ongoing commitment to environmentally

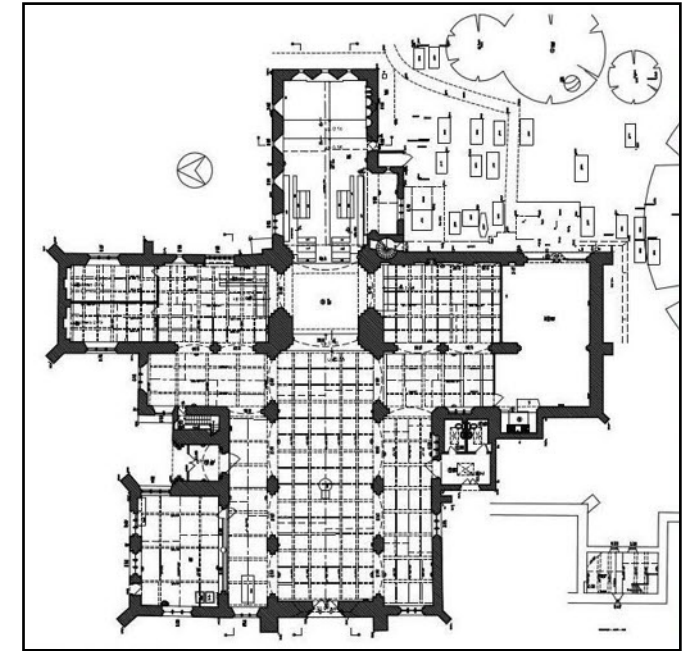
friendly living through which St Mary's hopes to encourage others in Witney.

With the population growing so rapidly with in-migration from other parts of the country, building a sense of history and of cultural identity is as important for the newcomers as for those born and bred in Witney.

A heritage and local identity trail would deepen an understanding of the area, its archaeology and sense of place. St Mary's, as the earliest building in Witney, is an obvious place to begin, working in partnership with the schools, local history organisations, the non-conformist churches and Witney Museum.

Heads of schools, those involved in music and the arts and key local figures agreed that St Mary's could become an important venue for exhibitions, drama, film and music.

Developing St Mary's great potential to become a major cultural asset in West Oxfordshire will benefit the wider community for generations.



Floorplan of St Mary's (top) and the spacious interior (above)

Recommendations

1. Encourage St Mary's to develop its position as mother parish church (or minster) serving Holy Trinity, St John's Hailey and St John's Curbridge in their diverse roles and to continue to place its liturgical life at the heart of its work.
2. Play to St Mary's strengths as a beautiful, historic and capacious building in a timeless setting by developing its role in West Oxfordshire as a major cultural venue.
3. Press ahead with the Appeal, prioritising a new, unifying and heated floor, flexible seating and lighting.
4. Consider inviting key arts organisations (eg [Witney Music Festival](#), [Witney Book Festival](#), [Witney Film Festival](#), [Witney Art Studios](#), [Witney TV](#)) to advise the Appeal.
5. Work with local business partners to create wedding (and other) packages which combine an understanding of the significance of the service (or event) with a range of reasonably priced catering, flowers, hairdressers, gowns/outfitters, venue dressing, photographers and invitations (or marketing materials).
6. Develop resources (with strong curriculum links) for primary and secondary teachers to facilitate their bringing students to the parish churches, including St Mary's, as part of the syllabus. Involve local schools in the development.
7. Create attractive guides and GPS apps for newcomers to St Mary's, immediately apparent on entering: historical, church historical, spiritual, pastoral, child-friendly and for those exploring the church as a venue. Signpost on to further resources.
8. Make the most of the east end sanctuary as a place set aside for quiet reflection. Provide directions from the north door, appropriate seating and helpful material for newcomers, visitors and pilgrims.
9. Consider the installation of inner glass doors at the west end, enabling the many passers-by to be inspired by the beauty of the (lit) interior, even when the church is locked. Smart low-level lighting along the pathway itself would be an asset.
10. Consider developing a heritage and local identity trail, particularly for the many newcomers to Witney, in partnership with [Witney Museum](#), schools and local organisations.
11. Upgrade the parish website, add 'virtual tours' of the parish churches and their activities. Widen participation and learning by making services and performances available online and/or podcast, particularly for the infirm, the housebound and for newcomers. Engage in a two-way fashion with Witney people, organisations and networks via social networking.
12. Consider upgrading the organ to recital standard to support first-rate musical performances.



Interior of St Mary's (top) and new housing near Bridge Street (above)



Burwell (top) and Wood Green (above)

Further information and links

[Parish of Witney](#)

[St Mary the Virgin, Witney](#)

[Holy Trinity Church, Wood Green](#)

[St John the Evangelist, Hailey](#)

[St John the Baptist, Curbridge](#)

[St Mary's Appeal](#)

[Witney Wool and Blanket Trail](#), leaflet by West Oxfordshire District Council & Oxfordshire County Council.

[A Walk Round Witney](#) Carroll, N., et al., Witney and District Historical and Archaeological Society, 1978

[Public Inquiry into the A4095 Witney: Cogges Link Road](#), West Oxfordshire District Council, 2011.

[Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010](#), Department for Communities and Local Government.

[Oxfordshire Data Observatory](#)

[Office for National Statistics](#)

[Nomis](#) (for labour market figures)

[Witney Town FC](#) (Blanketmen)

[Churches Together in Witney](#)

[West Oxfordshire District Council](#)

[Witney Town Council](#)

[Oxfordshire County Council](#)

[Local Development Framework](#), Draft Core Strategy, 2011

[Conservation area covering St Mary's](#), showing protected view lines.

[Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#), NHS Oxfordshire & Oxfordshire County Council, November 2010 (version 3)

[West Oxfordshire health Profile 2011](#)

[Draft Air Quality Action Plan](#), West Oxfordshire District Council, Dec 2010.

[UpMyStreet](#)

[Cottsway Housing Association](#)

[Police UK](#)

[Thames Valley Police](#)

[West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership](#)

[Witney Neighbourhood Action Group](#)

[Witney Music Festival](#)

[Witney Book Festival](#)

[Witney Film Festival](#)

[Witney TV](#)

[Witney Art Studios](#)

[The Henry Box School](#)

[St Mary's Infant School](#)

[The Batt C of E Primary School](#)

[Wood Green School](#)

[Cokethorpe School](#)

[The Kings School](#)

[Abingdon & Witney College](#)

[Citizens Advice Bureau](#)