

**CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY MEETING OF
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 2 September 2019

At 5.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present:

Councillors:	L Ashbourne O Collins J Aitman	L Duncan J King
Officers:	Sharon Groth Adam Clapton	Town Clerk Office Manager
Others:	No members of the public.	

1 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Cllr O Collins was proposed and seconded as Chair of the working party.

RESOLVED: that Cllr O Collins be elected Chair for the ensuing municipal year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr D Harvey.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

At this stage in the meeting the Chair invited members to explain their connection to the Corn Exchange and why they had wanted to be involved with this Working Party.

4 PHASE TWO REFURBISHMENT

Members received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated prior to the meeting. Although the Corn Exchange was currently a multi-use venue it was agreed it was time to review the Council's long-term vision for the hall so it could fulfil its potential in the centre of the town. The future development had to work for Witney and it was felt that it should offer a performance venue and community hub which was currently lacking in the town. It was effectively a blank canvas and the Council could be quite radical with its aspirations.

With regard to funding the Working Party were advised that a former application for a Lottery Heritage Grant was refused in 2014 as the criteria for the award was not met. There were however other possible grants and West Oxfordshire District Council had identified the delivery of an Arts Centre in Witney in their Infrastructure Plan so may be able to contribute. There were also Town Council earmarked reserves which could be used towards any refurbishment.

Members advised that there were a number of local groups looking to meet with the Council and be involved with this project. Many of these were former users who may want to consider returning and using the Corn Exchange as their home. It was agreed that representatives from these groups should be invited to become members of the wider Working Party.

It was suggested that the Corn Exchange should be able to attract small shows but should not solely be aimed at theatre and should include the wider arts, including music, film and literature as well as fulfilling a basic community need. Mindful of storage, the advantages and disadvantages of installing retractable seating and a stage were discussed either individually or together but with no chance of extending the backstage area the hall would only ever be capable of holding amateur or the small touring shows already discussed. It was felt that a café in the foyer should also be considered as it would be a good source of income and would help subsidise the running costs.

The Working Party agreed a vision was needed before taking advice from professional services as to what they can offer but this was an option that should seriously be explored so whatever the outcome, it was done in the right way from the start. Members also felt that site visits to similar venues in the vicinity should take place before the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Working Party notes the report; and,

- a) Sets its vision for the Corn Exchange as follows:

To create a modern, accessible, and affordable arts venue for Witney and its community, capable of facilitating both local and professional arts and performances.

- b) invites the following performance groups/individuals to be wider members:

- Abdabs Drama Group
- Adrian Phillips
- Jill Stew School of Dance
- Muzo Akademy
- Terry Powell
- West Oxfordshire Academy of Performing Arts (WOAPA)
- Witney Dramatic Society
- Witney Voicebox Choir

- c) undertakes site visits to similar sized venues including; The Mill at Banbury, Newbury Corn Exchange and the Old Fire Station in Oxford,

- d) obtains three quotes from theatrical consultants for proposals on development at the Corn Exchange,

- 1) requests a budget of up to £10,000 from the Town Council's Policy, Governance and Finance committee in relation to the above fees,

- e) enters into discussion with West Oxfordshire District Council regarding possible funding towards future refurbishment.

The meeting closed at: 6.16 pm

Chair