

Corn Exchange Working Party Meeting of Witney Town Council



Monday, 11th January, 2021 at 5.00 pm

To members of the Corn Exchange Working Party Committee - O Collins, L Ashbourne, J Aitman, L Duncan, A D Harvey and J King (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom** for the transaction of the business stated in the agenda below.

Admission to Meetings

All Council meetings are open to the public and press unless otherwise stated.

Admission to this meeting will be online by virtue of The Local Authorities & Police & Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority & Police & Crime Panels Meetings)(England & Wales) Regulations 2020.

Zoom login details of this meeting will be published on the Council's website prior to the meeting.

Recording of Meetings

Under the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 the council's public meetings may be recorded, which includes filming, audio-recording as well as photography.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Town Clerk or Democratic Services Officer know before the start of the meeting.

Agenda

1. Apologies for Absence

To consider apologies and reasons for absence

Working Party Members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Town Hall prior to the meeting, stating the reason for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests in any of the items under consideration at this meeting in accordance with the Town Council's code of conduct.

3. Minutes (Pages 3 - 6)

To receive and consider the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020.

4. 1863 Cafe Bar Operation (Pages 7 - 8)

To receive and consider the report of the Office Manager.

5. **Corn Exchange Refurbishment Update** (Pages 9 - 10)

To receive and consider the report of the Office Manager providing an update on this project.



Town Clerk

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

Held on Monday, 7 December 2020

At 5.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	L Ashbourne J Aitman	L Duncan J King
Officers:	Adam Clapton Tomas Smith	Office Manager Venue Manager
Others:	no members of the public.	

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3 MINUTES

The Working Party received and considered the minute of the meeting held on 7 September 2020.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party held on 7 September 2020 are an accurate account and should be signed by the Chair.

4 CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Office Manager reported that the Town Council had been awarded £32, 591.35 towards the Corn Exchange from the District Council Community Facilities Grant. This needed to be spent within 12 months.

Members discussed the terms of reference and agreed that these should stay the same.

RECOMMENDED: that the terms of reference remain the same.

5 **REQUEST TO RUN A CINEMA IN THE CORN EXCHANGE**

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Venue Manager concerning an offer of “technical support” to run a cinema in the Corn Exchange by the person who had formerly done so before the refurbishment. He had suggested a 50/50 split on profits although the Venue Manager had worked out that at the suggested ticket cost of £5.00 per person there would not be any profit, taking into account the restriction on numbers due to Covid-19. With an increased ticket price and bar takings there might be a small profit. Members were also asked to consider how long it might run for, if agreed.

Members discussed the Council’s previous experience of the Town Council facilitating a cinema and how long the project might run for. The Office Manager reminded members that the request was to run until March when the town’s cinema was due to re-open.

The Venue Manager reassured members that he would be stringent in implementing health and safety requirements.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and:-

1. that Mr Richards be permitted to run a cinema once per fortnight from January until March on agreed terms but that the Council reserves the right to give a two-week notice to terminate at any time;
2. that the pricing structure for tickets be delegated to the Venue Manager.

6 **1863 CAFE BAR OPERATION**

The Working Party received the report of the Venue Manager, who gave an additional update on the current operation of the 1863 bar. He was now recommending that with the staff working out of the reception area, the café could open with seating. The Compliance and Environment Officer had confirmed that this would be appropriate with restricted numbers and tables spread out.

RECOMMENDED: that the 1863 café bar opens 5 days a week (Tuesday – Saturday, with inside Seating available and all required Covid -safe elements put in place – this arrangement will be reviewed at the next meeting of the Working Party in January and would be subject to Government Guidance on Covid-19.

7 **CORN EXCHANGE PHASE TWO REFURBISHMENT UPDATE**

The Working Party received and considered a report from the Venue Manager. He had not been able to get in touch with the consultants at all which was disappointing but was aware that things needed to get moving quickly as the Council was now in receipt of time limited grant funding. Members were very concerned by this and felt that the Town Clerk should write to the consultants.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted and: -

1. that the Town Clerk to writes to Oxford Arts Consultants asking for a response from them by 4th January and if no communication was forthcoming, the Working Party be prepared to find alternative consultants;

2. that a door be installed just to the left of the noticeboard and the existing door into the hall from the kitchen be blocked up – the new door would be entrance only to avoid possible clashes with the main hall door;
3. that the provision and purchase of some protective vinyl flooring for the area behind the bar be delegated to the Venue Manager.

The meeting closed at: 5.42 pm

Chair

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CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY

Date: Monday 11th January 2021

Title: 1863 Café Bar Operation

Contact Officer: Office Manager – Adam Clapton

Background

At the previous meeting of this Working Party on 7th December members will recall the opening times of the 1863 Cafe Bar were extended to five days a week with immediate effect, to be reviewed in January.

Current Situation

Tier 4 Covid-19 restrictions were introduced in West Oxfordshire on 26th December 2020, followed by the national lockdown on Wednesday 6th January 2021 resulting in the closure of the Public Halls and the 1863 café Bar until further notice.

The day-time weekly sales figures for 1863 in December during the run-up to Christmas were disappointing but given the pandemic, not surprising. Public confidence in entering hospitality venues remains low, clearly impacting on the profitability and viability of the café at the present time. 1863 figures for December can be seen in the table below.

Dates (weekly)	Cumulative takings (Gross)	Equipment Costs (exc. VAT)	Staffing Costs
Tuesday 8 th – Saturday 12 th December	£ 161.50	£ 42.00	£ 225.00
Tuesday 15 th – Saturday 19 th December	£ 160.90	£ 42.00	£ 225.00
Tuesday 22 nd – Thursday 24 th December	£ 99.10	£ 42.00	£ 135.00

However, takings from the jazz evenings continue to be positive, affirming the Council’s decision to go ahead with this project to transform the Corn Exchange into a Community Arts Centre and to enhance events being held there. While the takings from these events off-set some of the costs above, consideration should be given to prioritising this aspect of operation, with every day use falling into place in the future when the pandemic is over and public confidence has returned.

Date	Takings (Gross) Including day-time takings	Staffing Costs
Wednesday 9 th December	£ 330.70	£ 36.00*
Monday 21 st December	£ 185.20	£ 36.00*

*Does not include the assistance of the Venue Manager

It should also be noted that utilities, licensing and other subsidiary costs are not included in the above figures, nor is VAT or mark-ups on purchased goods. A report on VAT and 'profit' can be obtained from the Café's till by the Venue Manager for a future meeting.

Environmental impact

There is no perceived environmental impact pertaining from the contents of this report.

Risk

There is a potential financial risk to the Council given the sales figures for 1863 in December amidst the continuing Covid-19 Pandemic.

Financial implications

Members should consider the financial implications of continued opening of the 1863 Café Bar five days a week while Covid-19 is in general circulation. Based on the weekly day-time figures in their simplest form, the Council made an approximate loss of £100 per week in the first two weeks of December. If the café had not been open at all, the loss would have been approximately £42 (equipment hire only).

The difference in the events income for the jazz evenings is self-evident from the figures.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Opening the 1863 Cafe Bar three days a week in the daytime (Thursday through to Saturday) with indoor seating when the Government guidance allows to maximise the possibility in the Council meeting its running costs, and;
2. That this be reviewed on a two-weekly basis, or based on up-to-date guidance and perceived footfall in the town, and;
3. That this decision be delegated to Officers so that they may be acted on quickly and effectively, and;
4. That these decisions are reported to the next appropriate meeting of this working party, or the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee, whichever should fall first, and;
5. That a full weekly opening of the 1863 Cafe/Bar is delayed until the effective* end of the Covid-19 pandemic, and;
6. At that time there is an official opening event with appropriate entertainment and publicity.
7. That outdoor seating (complimenting the indoor seating) is utilised safely when the guidance and weather allow on non-Market trading days.

*when the Council judges that Government guidance/statistics instil public confidence that it is safe to resume a semblance of normal daily activity and hospitality venues can welcome back patrons in substantive numbers.

CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY

Date: Monday 11th January 2021
Title: Corn Exchange Refurbishment Update
Contact Officer: Office Manager – Adam Clapton

The purpose of this report is to provide the Working Party with updates concerning the aspects of the continued refurbishment of the Corn Exchange.

Current Situation

Community Cinema

A meeting with Mr Richards was scheduled for the first week of January but Tier 4 and subsequent national lockdown restrictions have resulted in the postponement of this initiative. The Venue Manager will liaise with Mr Richards when Government guidance allows to proceed.

Main Hall Enhancements

Following the last meeting, the Town Clerk wrote to Oxford Arts Consultants enquiring as to their availability in January. A response was received advising that at this time they are regrettably not able to advise the Council on lighting, audio and seating.

The Venue Manager is currently researching other options on this and hopes to be able to report back to the Working Party soon.

As previously advised the Town Council has been awarded £35,951.00 by way of a Community Facilities Grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. This was based on audio, lighting and retractable seating being installed in the Main Hall for a total cost of £131,806.00 based on preliminary quotes already received for the works. The breakdown of this funding is as follows:

- Retractable Seating £55,000 (approximately)
- Audio & Lighting £77,000 (approximately)

Once the service of a consultant has been employed to assist with the technical specifications of the above aspects, the Council can publish tenders with the above budgets.

It should be noted that any subsidiary works i.e., removal of the kitchen door into the Main Hall will also be required to come out of the above total cost and should be reflected in final published budgets.

Environmental impact

There is no perceived environmental impact pertaining from this report.

Risk

The Council should consider the financial and reputational risks to the Council so should ensure that the best value for money and most robust equipment is sought from this tender process.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.