

Corn Exchange Working Party Meeting of Witney Town Council



Monday, 1st March, 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 11th January 2021.

4. Public Participation

The meeting will adjourn for this item.

Members of the public may speak for a maximum of **five minutes** each during the period of public participation, in line with Standing Order 42. Matters raised shall relate to the following items on the agenda.

5. **Exclusion of Press & Public**

To consider and if appropriate, to pass the following resolution:

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted

6. **Corn Exchange Phase Two Refurbishment** (Pages 7 - 54)

To receive and consider the report of the Venue Manager and accompanying confidential quotes concerning the refurbishment of the Main Hall at the Corn Exchange.



Town Clerk

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

Held on Monday, 11 January 2021

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 John Hickman	Office Manager Operations & Estates Officer
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 minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020.

RECOMMENDED:

That the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party meeting held on 7 December 2020 are an accurate account and should be signed by the Chair.

4 **1863 CAFE BAR OPERATION**

Members received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda.

The Working Party was advised that the daytime weekly sales figures were not what had been hoped for in the run up to Christmas; the equipment and staffing costs were currently outweighing sales and this was unlikely to change in the immediate future. However, the jazz evening takings in December had been encouraging.

The Working Party agreed that consumer confidence and footfall in the town had been severely dented due to the pandemic which had impacted on the sales for such a new venture. Although

the Corn Exchange and café would currently remain closed due to the pandemic, members discussed the merits of reducing day-time opening hours in the future and felt that it was important to have a clear plan moving forward for the Council, staff and customers.

Members agreed with the recommendations by officers and asked that as the weather improves, an element of flexibility is incorporated into plans in relation to opening days and outside seating.

As the café had not had time to fully establish itself it was agreed that amending drink charges was not something to consider at this point but would be undertaken by the Venue Manager as a matter of course in the future.

RECOMMENDED: - that the report be noted and: -

1. That the 1863 Café Bar opens three days a week in the daytime (Thursday through to Saturday) with indoor seating when the Government guidance allows, to maximise the possibility of the Council meeting its running costs, and;
2. That this will 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 the Venue Manager & Office Manager/Town Clerk so that they may be acted on quickly and effectively, and;
4. That these decisions be reported to the next appropriate meeting of this Working Party, or Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee, whichever should fall first.
5. That a full weekly opening of the 1863 Café 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 days.

5 **CORN EXCHANGE REFURBISHMENT UPDATE**

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda.

Members were advised that progress on a Community Cinema in the Corn Exchange was on hold due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Further discussions would be held on this project when Government guidance allowed.

The Working Party was also advised that Oxford Arts Consultants would not be available to offer technical advice on the enhancements to the Main Hall in the Corn Exchange; these being retractable seating, lighting, sound and acoustics.

With funds of approximately £132,000 available to make these improvements via earmarked reserves, Section 106 contributions and a Community Facilities Grant from West Oxfordshire District Council, the project was at an important juncture. The Venue Manager was currently

attempting to source other consultants and members asked if previous quotes could be revisited as part of this process. Once expertise had been sourced, a tender could be advertised.

RECOMMENDED: - that the report be noted and: -

That the Venue Manager reviews original quotations concerning the refurbishment of the Main Hall of the Corn Exchange, the previous consultants no longer being involved in this part of the project.

The meeting closed at: 5.35 pm

Chair

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CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY

Date:	1 st March 2021
Title:	Corn Exchange Phase Two Refurbishment
Contact Officer:	Venue Manager – Tomas Smith

Background

Witney Town Council had employed the services of the Oxfordshire Arts Consultants to assist the Venue Manager in the continued development of the Corn Exchange. As advised in the previous meeting, further assistance by this company is not possible at this time. Therefore, the Venue Manager was tasked to source alternative Consultants to allow the development of the Main Hall as a performance space to continue.

It was also delegated to the Venue Manager, at the last working party to commission several minor works in the Corn Exchange.

Current Situation

The Town Council is now in the position where it needs to appoint a firm of specialist Consultants to work with the Venue Manager on the next critical and time-sensitive stage of the Corn Exchange's continued development. Their primary job will be to advise on the equipment, focused on retractable seating, lighting, sound, and a specification of all materials required for the Main Hall; Specifically, to use their knowledge and expertise in drawing up the Tender which can then be advertised in line with the Council's financial regulations.

The Venue Manager has gathered quotes from three different Consultants he feels meet the criteria of the Corn Exchange development over the next twelve months. These are Drama by Design, Adrian James Acoustics and Theatreplan. All three firms appear to offer the services required and between them offer previous knowledge of the Corn Exchange and a portfolio of local and national developments. **The full quotes and a comparison summary are attached as appendices to this report for the Working Party's consideration (all prices are excluding VAT).**

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)

Mr T Powell has indicated he is available and willing to assist with the recommendation and future development of the Corn Exchange. It should be noted that Mr Powell has vast experience of both working on the Corn Exchange and putting on high profile shows in different theatres. He knows the Corn Exchange well and has always been a great source of information and enthusiasm.

Consultation

Once the Town Council has agreed on the consultants it would like to employ, it would be prudent to invite the local performing groups most associated with having a vested interest in using the Corn Exchange to meet with the chosen consultants to get their desired requirements across. We can therefore acknowledge the requests and wishes of the community and ensure we have the full list of requirements from any potential hirers and in turn use this information in the process of drawing up the tender.

Given the timeframe for expending the Community Facilities Grant is Autumn 2021, a suggested course of action for the above process should be agreed at the earliest opportunity.

Maximum capacity

The absolute maximum capacity of the hall is **180 seated**. This has been confirmed by the Compliance and Environment Officer. The total capacity is dictated by the width of the fire exit leading into the café and bar area. Due to the shape of the building this doorway cannot be widened so this ultimately caps the occupancy. 180 seated works with the original retractable seating quotes so there should not be any disruption to the original plans as developed by the original companies who quoted for the work.

Main Kitchen Access & Function

Following a previous meeting, officers have undertaken further investigation on the possibility of moving the door which leads into the main hall from the larger kitchen to allow for the retractable seating to be installed across the original exit point. The Compliance and Environment Officer has stated that the current larger kitchen does not require a second door and unless we plan on turning it into a fully kitted out commercial kitchen there is no need to relocate the door to sit alongside the noticeboard. Any door which was installed would have to be clear and fire regulation compliant and would have to be covered by the existing hall door when the hall was open to allow hirers to enter and exit the hall.

Considering this information, officers have investigated the possibility of installing a hatch looking into the kitchen instead of relocating the door. The Compliance and Environment Officer has confirmed that this would need to be fire rated and therefore unattractive as it would be a metal shutter which would automatically close in the case of a fire. Therefore, installing an aesthetically pleasing shutter in place is not as straightforward as previously thought.

Bar Vinyl

The Venue Manager has sourced suitable vinyl to be installed behind the bar, this will be installed on March 3rd and will protect and maintain the existing floor.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make regarding its facilities and services it operates.

- Minimal as majority of consultancy work will be undertaken online.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should consider any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

- Financial risk of employing consultants to advise and assist with tender process and following through on their recommendations.
- Reputational Risk of employing the consultants to work on this arts centre which will be suitable for the people of Witney.
- Operational risk of disruption due to construction which might hinder the existing hirers and therefore income revenue.
- Health and Safety of Employees and Hirers must be considered during this development process.

Financial implications

- A budget for consultancy work of £10,000 has previously agreed and was going to be used by Oxfordshire Arts Consultants. To date, £450 of this has been allocated.
- Any funds above the amount remaining would need to be requested from the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee, the expenditure coming from the Town Council's general reserve.

A grant assistance request from Witney Town Hall Charity was made in 2020 – correspondence advising the request was unsuccessful is attached for information.

Recommendations

- That the report be noted; and,
- That the Working Party decides which consultants to recommend to the Town Council for undertaking this project (including Mr T Powell as an advisor)
- That the setting of the timeframe and possible consultation with users be delegated to Officers
- That the function of the main kitchen be agreed

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Confidential Quote Summary
- Appendix 2: Quote from Theatreplan
- Appendix 3: Quote from Adrian James Acoustics
- Appendix 4: Quote from Drama by Design
- Appendix 5: Witney Town Hall Charity Correspondence

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WITNEY TOWN HALL CHARITY

CLERK TO THE TRUSTEES: MRS J WHITE
TOWN HALL, MARKET SQUARE, WITNEY, OXON, OX28 6AG
Tel : (01993) 704379 Fax : (01993) 771893

Your Ref: M5/2

Mrs Sharon Groth
Town Clerk
Witney Town Council
Town Hall
Market Square
Witney
Oxon OX28 6AG

30th January 2021

Dear Sharon

Corn Exchange Grant Request

In March 2020 you applied to the Trustees for a grant towards the provision of tables and chairs for use in the café/bar area of the Corn Exchange. Due to the rules imposed as a consequence of the Covid-19 lockdown, it has taken some time for a meeting to be held to consider all applications received.

A meeting has now taken place and the Trustees discussed your application, but I regret that in this instance they decided not to award a grant. Whilst they are normally in favour of supporting the various initiatives provided by the Council and welcome the fact that further improvements to the facilities at the Corn Exchange are planned, they felt that in the current situation it was not the appropriate time to provide this particular facility.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to the Trustees

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