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**Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments**  
**Committee Meeting of Witney Town Council**



**Monday, 6th November, 2023 at 6.00 pm**

To members of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee - R Crouch, D Enright, O Collins, J Aitman, D Edwards-Hughes, D Newcombe, J Treloar and R Smith (and all other Town Councillors for information).

You are hereby summonsed to the above meeting to be held in the **Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney** 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.

Any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting and speak on a particular item should contact the Committee Clerk ([derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk](mailto:derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk)) in advance.

**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 Deputy Town Clerk or Committee Clerk know before the start of the meeting.

**Agenda**

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To consider apologies and reasons for absence.

Committee Members who are unable to attend the meeting should notify the Committee Clerk [derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk](mailto:derek.mackenzie@witney-tc.gov.uk) **prior to the meeting**, stating the reason for absence.

**Standing Order 30(a)(v)** permits the appointment of substitute Councillors to a Committee whose role is replace ordinary Councillors at a meeting of a Committee if ordinary Councillors of the Committee have confirmed to the Proper Officer **before** the meeting that they are unable to attend.

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 4 - 7)

a) To receive and consider the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Minutes held on 4 September 2023;

b) Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda (Questions on the progress any item).

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. **Finance Report: Revised Revenue Budget 2023/24 and Draft Base Revenue Budget for 2024/25** (To Follow)

To receive the report from the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

6. **Revenue Growth Items, Special Revenue Projects, and Capital Projects** (To Follow)

To receive and consider the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) with an update on the current year's work programme relating to Capital and Special Revenue Projects; as well as projects identified during the course of the year for inclusion as Revenue Growth Items or Special Revenue Projects in the Council's Revenue Budget or Capital Projects for 2024/25 and beyond.

7. **Schedule of Proposed Fees and Charges 2024/25** (To Follow)

During Budget Setting Cycle the Council reviews its Fees and Charges for the various facilities and services it operates.

Attached is the schedule of charges in respect of the assets and services which fall under the responsibility of this Committee. The Committee is recommended to approve (or amend as necessary).

8. **Resident Satisfaction Survey Comments** (Pages 8 - 9)

To receive the report from the Deputy Town Clerk.

**Public Halls**

9. **Public Halls Report** (To Follow)

To receive the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

10. **Public Halls Events Report** (To Follow)

To receive the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

11. **Corn Exchange Business Plan** (To Follow)

To receive the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

12. **Public Halls Safety & Security** (Pages 10 - 11)

To receive the report of the Head of Estates & Operations.

**Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards**

13. **Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards 2024-25** (Pages 12 - 13)

To receive and consider the report of the Operations Manager.

14. **Town Council Burials Service** (Pages 14 - 16)

To receive the report of the Senior Administrative Officer.

15. **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.

16. **Property & Legal Matters (To Follow)**

To receive and consider the confidential report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O.



Town Clerk

# Agenda Item 3

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday, 11 September 2023

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

### Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	D Enright J Aitman D Edwards-Hughes	D Newcombe R Smith
Officers:	Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Mark Lewis Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	No members of the public.	

#### H466 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor O Collins.

#### H467 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

#### H468 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 July 2023 were received.

Members received an update on the progress on the following:

H283 – A list of tasks had been provided to the Probation Service relating to support they can provide the Council to maintain the lake and Snipe meadow.

H383 – Councillor R Crouch advised the Witney Allotment Association no longer required the gate replacement at Lakeside Allotments.

H275 – The Operations Manager would investigate installing surplus cycle racks at St Mary's Churchyard.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

H469 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

H470 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

A Member raised a question regarding the low level of income from burials and was advised it was affected by the number of ashes interments rather than a coffin burials and the relatively low number of burials since April.

A Member also was concerned that the Food & Drink Gross Margin was close to zero and with the neighbouring shop to open as a café what further effect that would have. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Venue & Events Officer was preparing a business plan for the next meeting of the committee on 13 November 2023.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

H471 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer with an update on the activity of the Public Halls.

Members were pleased to see that the decorating had commenced in the Café and looked forward to the Gallery Room and stairway being completed. An update was also provided on new blinds and other improvements at Burwell Hall which Officers would communicate via social media.

Members were also appreciative for the efforts around promoting Childrens film events and the Women's World Cup, these events were gratefully received by many children and their families and were a great example of how the Corn Exchange was a community Venue. Members considered other events, including sporting ones, that could be shown and delegated to officers to consider each on its merits against the need for security and availability around other existing bookings.

The Committee was surprised that only one cafe voucher had been issued to vulnerable families over the summer as part of a Witney Community Church initiative. Members discussed the potential for a "pay it forward" scheme to be run from the 1863 café, Councillor Aitman would look into how these schemes run for other establishments and report back.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, Officers review potential sporting events that could be shown in the Corn Exchange.
3. That, the comparable booking activity figures for the public halls be noted.

*Councillor D Enright joined the meeting at 18:12pm*

**H472 PUBLIC HALL EVENTS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer as well as a verbal update from the Head of Estates and Operations (HEO) regarding the review of events held in the Corn Exchange.

Members had several questions and therefore more it was requested that information be included in the breakdown. The HEO assured members that future reports would contain more details such as the costs incurred by the council, net profits and grouping by activity.

The Committee considered the proposal of amending a range of Group 4 charges for performances and technical rehearsals. The Deputy Town Clerk reminded members of the Council's vision statement to 'run and maintain a small community arts facility', and although the charges may seem higher, the Venue and Events Officer had included a bar charge in the proposed fees and that in some cases they would work out more cost effective than the current charges for local performing groups.

Members were pleased to hear that Witney Dramatic Society would soon be returning to the Corn Exchange to preform having held their performances elsewhere in recent years.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, future reports contain more information on the financial breakdown of events held at the Corn Exchange and,
3. That, the simplified Group 4 charges, as presented, be implemented by the Council.

**H473 CEMETERY FEEDBACK**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with a verbal update on Cemetery matters.

Members received the minutes of the Friends of the Cemeteries meeting held on 29 August 2023.

They also received the results of the council's entry of Windrush Cemetery into the Cemetery of the Year award. Members noted the comments on judging and benchmarking and that officers would implement changes where they could. There were, however, some suggestions which weren't in line with the Council's policies so the Committee asked that improvements and suggestions be passed to the Friends of the Cemeteries group to discuss.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report and verbal report be noted and,
2. That, Officers liaise with Friends of the Cemeteries to improve the Cemetery proposition where possible.

H474 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC**

**Resolved:**

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission 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.

H475 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

Members received and considered correspondence from Witney Allotment Association (WAA) regarding the services and administration they provide.

Members welcomed the close working relationship with the Association, assisted via the regular contact with both the Operations Manager and the Town Council's nominated representative, Councillor Crouch on their Committee.

There was agreement that the current arrangement for administration of allotments should continue.

The Chair advised there was a need for a storage shed and lawn mower at Lakeside Allotments, members discussed the request and recommended these be funded from the Council's earmarked Allotments reserve. All members agreed.

Members went on to discuss matters arising from two of the buildings in the Council's portfolio. This included the need for replacement glazing in Langdale Hall to ensure the property was maintained correctly and to help improve the council's carbon footprint.

They also heard the lease at Madley Park Hall was due for renegotiation.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Witney Allotment Association are contacted to advise the current arrangement for administration of allotments should continue and,
3. That, a storage shed and lawnmower to the cost of £2,900 and £300 respectively be funded from the allotments earmarked reserve and,
4. That, the Town Clerk explore options for replacement glazing for Langdale Hall, and into funding in consultation with the tenants.
5. That, the Town Clerk explores options regarding the lease at Madley Park Hall

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The meeting closed at: 7.18 pm

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Chair

# Agenda Item 8

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 6 November 2023  
**Title:** Resident's Satisfaction Survey Comments  
**Contact Officer:** Deputy Town Clerk

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### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with a detailed breakdown of comments received during the Town Council's Resident Satisfaction Survey earlier this year to help inform future budget-setting for items under the remit of this Committee.

### **Current Situation**

Members are asked to consider whether any of these items should be included in the Council's emerging Strategic Plan, and therefore whether budgets need to be incorporated in the short, medium, or long-term. The comments were:

#### **Burwell Hall**

Condition of Burwell Hall is poor - old & tatty

#### **Corn Exchange**

Harsh lighting in corn exchange - spoils the atmosphere  
Events at the Corn Exchange are not properly advertised - leading to poor attendance.  
Disappointing Council cars have to park in Langdale Court  
Corn Exchange website to book doesn't work properly

#### **Tower Hill Cemetery**

Tower Hill cemetery not well maintained - graves damaged by practices

#### **Windrush Cemetery**

Windrush Cemetery needs weeding  
Better access needed by foot to Windrush cemetery

The following table shows how the services scored overall in the survey.

	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>Total</b>
Cemeteries	37	63	25	6	83	214
Public Halls Corn Exchange	63	78	23	4	43	211
Public Halls Burwell Hall	16	43	22	8	122	211

During the summer Burwell Hall has been redecorated and has received a new boiler and blinds. There are further improvements planned for the toilets and changing rooms. Communications on this are pending.

Events at the Corn Exchange are being considered in the Business Plan being presented to the Committee as a separate item.

There was an issue with vegetation and growth in April due to the wet spring; the Operations Manager is exploring ways of dealing with weeds via the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee.

There have been complaints regarding damage to graves. Due to the layout of the cemeteries, it is regrettable but unavoidable that machinery has to traverse over graves and that topsoil from prepared graves has to temporarily be laid on another. The Council will repair damage by seeding etc as soon as possible after use.

Better access at Windrush Cemetery is expected from the delivery of the Witney East Strategic Development. The Council has a growing earmarked reserve to set out internal roads and paths once this is completed.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

### **Risk**

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

There is a reputational risk if the Council does not address comments received in its satisfaction survey.

The Council's committees will have competing demands on the overall Council budget so other projects may take priority over these.

### **Financial implications**

➤ There are no new implications from the contents of this report.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report.

# Agenda Item 12

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 6 November 2023  
**Title:** Public Halls Safety & Security  
**Contact Officer:** Town Clerk – Sharon Groth

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### **Background**

The Council has a duty of care to advise and assess risk for employees who work by themselves under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Whilst most employees work in twos or teams, Caretaking staff within the public halls working outside of office hours are often lone working.

### **Current Situation**

There have been several incidents in the Corn Exchange recently which involved three young people accessing both the ladies and gents toilets and squirting hand soap on the floors, mirrors and wash basin. This resulted in the toilets having to be closed because it was a risk to hall users from slipping over as the floor had been made very slippery.

During this incident, the young people were rude and abuse to the staff and hall hirers.

Further incidents have occurred subsequently, and in fact resulting in a serious incident termed as a transphobic hate crime.

The incidents have been captured on CCTV which has been shared with the Police, to try and identify these young people. It is hoped that once identified the Council may be able to ban them from the Corn Exchange, but in the meantime, Officers are reviewing the Lone Working Policy to risk assess and safeguard employees at these most vulnerable times.

In respect of Burwell Hall, whilst no incidents have been reported, this is still an area of concern. Particularly the way the bookings operate for hirers to access the building. Officers are reviewing how an electronic access facility could work and the associated costings to see if a viable option is available.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

**Risk**

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

As mentioned above, the Council does have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 for its employees. With these incidents occurring on a regular basis, measures need to be taken to try and mitigate any impact on staff wellbeing and interrupting meetings/hirings.

**Financial implications**

There are no known direct financial implications arising from this report at the preset time. Officers will be looking into costing out solutions – whether that is better access arrangement, CCTV or other safeguarding measures, and a report will be brought back to the next meeting.

**Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and the situation around safety and security in the Council's public halls.

# Agenda Item 13

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 6 November 2023

**Title:** Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards 2024-25

**Contact Officer:** Operations Manager

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### **Background**

Under the Local Government Act 1972, the council (Witney Town Council) maintains the walls and fences of both Holy Trinity and St Mary's Church as closed churchyards. The definition of maintenance is to be kept in decent order.

Church representatives for Holy Trinity have contacted the council and requested the council carry out repairs to the arch and supporting pillars as you enter Holy Trinity's churchyard. The metal archway and retaining stone pillars need repair; the pillar capping stones need replacing and the metal arch requires work to secure it back in place.

### **Current Situation**

From a health and safety perspective, the arch is currently safe, and the issues are just aesthetic for the church. However, it will continue to deteriorate in its current state and become unsafe. If the arch were to be left it would simply be removed by Witney Town Council staff and stored to remove the risk of injury.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

### **Risk**

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

The council could receive negative press if it is found responsible for not maintaining the historic churchyard. This would become evident if the arch did have to be removed for health and safety reasons.

## **Financial implications**

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The Closed Churchyard maintenance budget 4036/303 annually is £11,000.00, £10,000.00 is rolled into a budget for the repairs to St Mary's boundary wall leaving £1,000.00 for closed churchyard maintenance.
- The cost to have the stone pillars recapped, arch removed and reinstalled is quoted at £3,150.40 ex VAT.
- The cost to have the arch repaired is estimated to be around £2,000.00.

## **Recommendations**

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

1. An increase to The Closed Churchyard maintenance budget 4036/303 of £5,000.00 to £16,000.00 for the 2024-25 financial year only.

# Agenda Item 14

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 6 November 2023  
**Title:** Town Council Burials Service  
**Contact Officer:** Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk

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### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the burial services provided by Witney Town Council. The Council operates two Cemeteries in Witney; Windrush Cemetery and Tower Hill Cemetery. Windrush Cemetery opened in 2004 and offers lawn, Meadow and Woodland burials along with an Ashes Path. Tower Hill has operated since 1857 and has approximately 9,500 plots which are mainly Lawn Burials with some Family Ashes plots.

### **Current Situation**

The Council usually takes initial instruction from a Funeral Director; the administration team will liaise with them to book a suitable time in the cemetery diary and obtain the relevant paperwork to ensure that that burial takes place lawfully. The importance of this work cannot be underestimated, as it is imperative that our records are held accurately.

The team may at times deal directly with a bereaved family to take them through the process without the use of a Funeral Director, usually to avoid the additional cost. This however does lead to great time commitment from the administration team.

Once a burial booking is in place, the Councils Work's team will prepare the grave and attend the ceremony to again ensure that the burial is lawful.

### Windrush

There are a number of Coffin burials options. It is important to note that the majority of burials are in the lawned area, and the initial burial is at Double Depth to maximise the use of the land. Windrush Cemetery also offers the interment of cremated remains on an Ashes Path.

### Tower Hill

All Burial plots are reserved. However, a small number of new reservations can be made for the interment of Ashes.

Recent Activity – Please see the attached table.

Over the past 12 months the council has carried out a total of 94 interments, 40 were Coffin burials and 54 the burial of Cremated Remains. These were roughly evenly split across the two cemeteries.

It is difficult to predict the number of burials however it is important to note that the Council does see additional pressures on the Councils works teams during summer months due to grounds maintenance duties. Burials are the primary duty for the team and therefore it is important to be mindful when conversing with residents regarding such complaints as the length of grass on recreational areas. Likewise, February and March usually see the highest number of interments in the winter months.

During the same period the council sold 73 Exclusive Rights of Burial (EROB) – this is a lawful document which dictates who owns the right to be buried in a grave. 48 of the 73 were used for immediate Burial. The remaining being sold as reservations for a future burial usually so that family members can be laid to rest together or because individuals are making arrangements for their future demise. Again, the process is handled by the Administration Team who are more than happy to discuss the options available with residents.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The maximising of the use of land, such as the decision to bury at Double Depth in Windrush Cemetery supports the councils aims.

### **Risk**

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

### **Financial implications**

➤ None resulting from this report.

### **Recommendations**

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

	2022		2023										
Column1	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
<b>Windrush</b>													
Single Depth Burial	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5
Double Depth Burial	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	4	1	2	18
Ashes	1	1	1	3	5	3	2	2	3	2	3	0	26
<b>Tower Hill</b>													
Burials	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	17
Ashes	1	2	2	3	3	6	2	0	3	3	2	1	28
<b>EROB's</b>	10	1	7	6	9	9	5	3	5	6	2	8	71