

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

Held on Monday, 16 September 2024

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	J Robertshaw
	D Edwards-Hughes	R Smith
	D Newcombe	O Collins
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
	Tomas Smith	Venue & Events Officer
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Adam Cook	Project Officer
Others:	No members of the public.	

H485 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D Enright, Councillor G Meadows attended as a substitute.

H486 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Edwards-Hughes declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 9 by virtue of the CEO of the ICE centre being known to him as a fellow member of the West Oxfordshire Conservatives Association.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

(Councillor G Meadows joined the meeting at 6:04pm)

H487 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 July 2024 were received.

H372 – Members were updated that the proposed work to the church path were due to be commenced by Oxfordshire County Council soon.

H374 – Officers advised of the difficulty of obtaining the Metro Newspaper as it was only available via the Oxford Tube bus giving staff only one opportunity to collect a copy.

H385 – The replacement fencing at Newlands Allotments was complete. The Allotments Association was in contact with affected allotments holders ahead of agreeing access for the fencing to be installed at Hailey Road.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 July 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

H488 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

H489 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

Members were pleased to see that with four months elapsed of the financial year income and expenditure were in line with budget projections.

In response to a Members question regarding the Councils two largest costs, Staffing and Energy, the RFO confirmed that he would prepare a summary document for presentation at a future meeting.

The Leader of the Council reminded members of the importance to consider items to be included in the 2025/26 budget as these would need to be included in the next cycle of meeting discussions.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for the period 1 April to 31 July 2024 be approved and,
3. That, the RFO prepares a review of the overall position of energy and staffing costs against budgets.

H490 **RESIDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk (DTC) which provided details of actions taken in response the residents survey conducted earlier in the year.

A Member raised the ongoing issue of dog mess and the Committee recognised the difficulty in encouraging dog owners to respect the town and its green spaces. Members understood the continued work put in by Officers to promote the issue via notices and social media. It was requested that Officers again issue a press release to the Witney Gazette for inclusion in the printed press.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers issue a press release regarding dog mess to the Witney Gazette.

H491 **CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report along with a verbal update from the Deputy Venue & Events Officer (DVEO) concerning the recent and upcoming events in the public halls.

Members agreed with the DVEO in his assessment as to the poor attendance figures for the children's summer film showings which had previously been very well attended. Members understood the reasons that the last two screenings were cancelled.

The Committee heard that following the scaling back for the classic film club, that a new daytime film matinee screening was to be introduced with the hope it would appeal to a larger audience.

Members also received updates on the ideas to increase promotion of events, the successful summer outside music events, a wedding fayre event and also the upcoming events schedule.

Lastly, the DVEO reminded members of the arrangements for the Advent Fayre event on 1 December as their support was pivotal to the running of the event.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers investigate the benefits of paid social media marketing.

H492 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received the report and verbal update of the Venue & Events Officer regarding requests for capital expenditure.

Members were pleased to hear the news that the Gallery Room conference equipment installation was due to be completed on 23 September as this would increase its potential for hire.

The Committee welcomed the suggestions outlined in the report which were felt would raise the profile of the Corn Exchange and illustrate the Council's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint. However, without full details of costs Members could not give a firm commitment.

Therefore, they looked forward to receiving full costings at the next meeting of the Committee and evaluate if these costs could be met from either existing budgets or should be included in the 2025/26 budget setting.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Officers explore the costs of a replacement website provider, energy saving external noticeboards, a replacement internal noticeboard, external promotional flags and replacement Kitchen Equipment and,

3. That, an update be provided to the next Committee meeting on 11 November so that costs be considered for budget purposes.

H493 **LANGDALE HALL RENOVATION & MADLEY PARK HALL PARTITION**

The Committee received the report of the Project Officer along with a verbal update.

Members heard that Officers were working closely with the tenant of Langdale Hall to explore and assist in the application for potential grant funding to finance the works that were required. Members were unanimous in agreement that the programme of works was necessary to protect the historic building, the tenancy and support a much-needed community service that the tenant provided.

The Project Officer confirmed that the works at Madley Park Hall had been successful, and they would be completed later the same week.

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal update be noted.

H494 **PUBLIC HALLS BUSINESS PLAN UPDATES**

The Committee received and considered the updated Business Plans for Burwell Hall and Café 1863 which has been prepared by the Venue & Events Officer who explained that a quarterly update would be provided in respect of the Objectives in the plans.

A Member asked that the Financial Appraisal section of the plans make it clear that the venues, particularly Burwell Hall, are a community asset and that there would always be a cost to provide them. All members were in agreement.

A Member outlined her thoughts in respect of the need to quantify the value of Café 1863 as a standalone operation, after two years of trading she felt that it was important to evaluate prices and focus on costs. It was agreed that though savings could be made via staffing it was important to not lose the level of service provided; many of the Café's customers experienced a reduced level of social contact and the café was a valuable resource to these individuals/groups.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Financial Appraisal section be updated to reflect the comments of the Committee and,
3. That, costs of the Café be reviewed and monitored by Officers and,
4. That, the next update of the Business Plans Objectives be provided to the meeting of the Committee on 20 Jan 2025.

H495 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY - MEMORIAL MONOLITH**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager in respect to the installation of a memorial monolith within Windrush Cemetery.

Members all agreed that the proposed location of the memorial was more fitting and created an easier access to those visiting the cemetery to pay respects. Members also agreed that the cost for new plaques should remain the same and should any existing plaque require relocating, then this cost would be borne by the Council.

The Committee considered the options of Oak or Stone, a vote was taken, with 5 members in favour of Oak and 2 in favour of Stone.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, the installation of an Oak monolith be installed for the approximate sum of £850 and,
3. That, the cost of a plaque to remain at £60.50 and,
4. That, the costs of any plaques to be relocated be borne by the Council.

The meeting closed at: 7.20 pm

Chair